

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

July 18-21

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Date: **July 22, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Failed Touristic Season in Abkhazia

After introduction of the restriction on flights from Moscow to Tbilisi Abkhazians thought that it would promote touristic season there, but as it appears it did not help much. Majority of the hotels and restaurants are empty. The real reason behind it is said to be high rate of criminal: abduction of people and robbery. In addition, infrastructural malfunctions and inadequately high prices affect the season itself. These are the problems which exist for last several years. Counting from this summer further problem had been indicated – fraud tour. Many people bought tours from Russia and they could not get promised services at all. Russian media is writing that at least 1000 citizens have been triggered with this method.

Abkhazian government itself recognizes the failure of the season, but they as usual blame Georgian side for this. Apparently they say that protest rallies in Tbilisi affected flow of tourists in Abkhazia.

Head of Abkhazian Hotel Union says that often Russian cannot differentiate Abkhazia from Georgia: "They often think that everything what is happening in Tbilisi is connected to Sokhumi. We hoped that Abkhazia would replace Georgia for Russian tourists but it didn't go according to our hopes. Following to the protest rallies in Tbilisi tourists started canceling reservations in Abkhazia as well. The range of hotels working is 40-60% and this not operable data" (*Rezonansi, July 22, 2019*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

2. Anatoly Bibilov invited Daniel Ortega to South Ossetia

De-facto President of Tskhinvali Region Heads of South Ossetia and Nicaragua Anatoly Bibilov and Daniel Ortega discussed the development of relations between the friendly "countries", the establishment of mutually beneficial cooperation, the presidential press service reports.

The meeting of the so called President of South Ossetia, Anatoly Bibilov, and President of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, took place at the end of the visit to the Republic of the South Ossetian delegation.

Anatoly Bibilov thanked Daniel Ortega for the invitation to visit Nicaragua and the warm welcome extended to the delegation of South Ossetia. In turn, Daniel Ortega has noted that the visit of the President of the friendly country is important for the people of Nicaragua (*Cominf.org, July 19, 2019*).

3. 94th Meeting of IPRM held in Ergneti

On July 18, the 94th Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) Meeting was held in village Ergneti, near the occupation line with Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

Head of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM), Erik Høeg, and Special Representative for the South Caucasus of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Ambassador Rudolf Michalka, co-facilitated the meeting.

Installation of “obstacles and barriers” along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL), “the negative impact of ‘borderization’ on the lives of people on both sides of the ABL,” illegal detentions, alleged airspace violations and other security-related issues, as well as the death of Archil Tatunashvili and Davit Basharuli were addressed at yesterday’s IPRM meeting.

Representatives of the State Security Service of Georgia again demanded transfer of Tatunashvili’s internal organs and personal belongings, and investigation into death of Davit Basharuli (*Civil.ge, July 19, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Georgia to host Multinational Military Exercise

Georgia will host the Multinational Military Exercise Agile Spirit 2019 from July 27 to August 9. The training will be launched at the base of the Second Infantry Brigade in Senaki, Samegrelo region.

The military training will be held for the 9th time in Georgia, according to Defense Ministry. The main message this year will be “Power is in Partnership.”

Agile Spirit 2019 will take place in Senaki, Orpholo and Vaziani bases. More than 3000 military officers of NATO member and partner states will participate in the exercises.

The 14 countries will be involved in it: Georgia, US, United Kingdom, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Norway, Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine (*ITV, July 20, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

5. Public Registry registered Paata Salia as Director-General of Rustavi 2 TV

After the announcement of the decision by Strasbourg Court, National Public Registry of Georgia registered Kibar Khalvashi as the owner of Rustavi 2 TV Company. The registry document reads that he owns 60% of the shares personally, and the remaining 40% – via a limited liability company “Panorama”. Based on the document published on the web page of the Public Registry, a meeting of partners of Rustavi 2 TV Company has been held today. By the decision of the meeting, Nika Gvaramia was replaced by Paata Salia to the post (*ITV, July 18, 2019*).

6. Paata Salia: Editorial policy is to be determined by the company, by journalists employed in it

“Editorial policy is to be determined by the company. I mean the journalists employed in it. Someone might like it, someone may not, but I’m not going to make any comments. Now I have other obligations, I have another post. herefore, from this point of view, any my statements can be perceived as pressure, indication or something else. My position, in general, is that any media outlet should be as critical as possible. We want to live in a democratic country. Freedom of expression is inviolable in a democratic state. For me, Rustavi 2 and other media outlets are more or less critical”, – Paata Salia, New Director General of Rustavi 2 said (*Rustavi 2, July 18, 2019*).

7. Vasil Maghlaperidze: Nobody would have dared to offer employees of First Channel to move to Rustavi 2 TV Company

Nobody would have dared to offer the employees of the Georgian First Channel to move to Rustavi 2 TV Company, this's absurd, totally ridiculous, – Vasil Maghlaperidze, Director General of Georgian First Channel said in response to the statement made by the member of the European Georgia party Gigi Ugulava.

“Mr. Gigi has composed this lie to mislead the public. Nobody would have dared to offer the employees of the Georgian First Channel to move to Rustavi 2 TV Company, this is absurd, totally ridiculous. There are 1200 people, employed on the First Channel. Such foolishness would never come to anybody's mind, in particular, to say to any employee to move to Rustavi 2 TV Company. He even did not name the source.” – Vasil Maghlaperidze said (*ITV, July 18, 2019*).

8. Salome Zurabishvili: European Court of Human Rights ruled unprecedented decision for Georgia

“Today, the European Court of Human Rights of Strasbourg, Europe, made an unprecedented decision for Georgia. With this decision, the European Court acknowledged the impartiality of the Georgian judiciary system and the fairness of its decision in the case discussed. Through this decision, the European Court of Human Rights declared its confidence in our judicial system. This confidence sets the ground to launch the fourth wave of judicial reform and, thus, further strengthen our democracy. By this judgment, the European Court of Human Rights once again underlined two principles on which democracy, and Europe, stand: inviolability of property rights and human life. As the guarantor of these rights under the Constitution, I fully share the spirit of the European Court of Human Rights and the necessity to implement these principles. I also believe that Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Expression, as the main pillars of democracy, will not be threatened in Georgia, “- said Salome Zurabishvili (*ITV, July 18, 2019*).

9. Mamuka Bakhtadze: Strasbourg Court decision is yet another confirmation that we did not have fair justice under Saakashvili's regime

“European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) Ruling is yet another confirmation that we did not have a fair justice during the rule of the United National Movement (UNM) and Saakashvili. People were killed, their lives were abused, property rights were violated and individuals were tortured” – stated Mamuka Bakhtadze, Prime Minister of Georgia when commenting on the ECHR Court Ruling today.

As for the Case of Rustavi 2, Head of Government of Georgia believes that ECHR has not found any deviations at any stage of the national justice system. The referred Court Ruling prevails and should be binding to all, according to the Prime Minister of Georgia (*ITV, July 19, 2019*).

10. Irakli Okruashvili states that Rustavi 2 belongs to him and he can prove it

Irakli Okruashvili, former Defence Minister and now leader of the political movement “Victorious Georgia” requests to freeze the Kibar Khalvashi's shares of Rustavi 2 registered in the Public Register. Okruashvili filed the regarding suit to the City Court. As the claimant says the reason for the suit is the agreement between Kibar Khalvashi and Irakli Okruashvili, which was signed in Berlin in 2010 (*ITV, July 19, 2019*).

11. US Embassy: We encourage the implementation of the Court's ruling on Rustavi 2 case in a manner that is fair, apolitical

"We have watched carefully the situation related to the July 18 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on Rustavi 2. Freedom of speech and a media landscape representative of a plurality of views are foundations of democracy. We encourage the implementation of the Court's ruling in a manner that is fair, apolitical, and allows for a multitude of opinions to be represented in the media.

The United States remains committed to helping Georgia protect freedom of speech and preserve a diverse media landscape", – reads the statement released by the US Embassy (*Rustavi 2, July 19, 2019*).

12. Paata Salia: Document, about which Irakli Okruashvili points out, is forged

"From the very beginning we raised the issue in the court that the document is forged. Okruashvili claimed as if he lent Kibar Khalvashi 7 million USD as a loan and he demanded Kibar Khalvashi to return the money with interest. The second part of this agreement was related Rustavi 2, as if all rights belonged to Irakli Okruashvili and if Kibar Khalvashi filed a lawsuit, he should pay the 7 million for Irakli Okruashvili. Kibar Khalvashi says that this document is false and the expertise will confirm it", – Paata Salia said (*1TV, July 19, 2019*).

13. According to Paata Salia request of journalists on setting up a Public Board was rejected

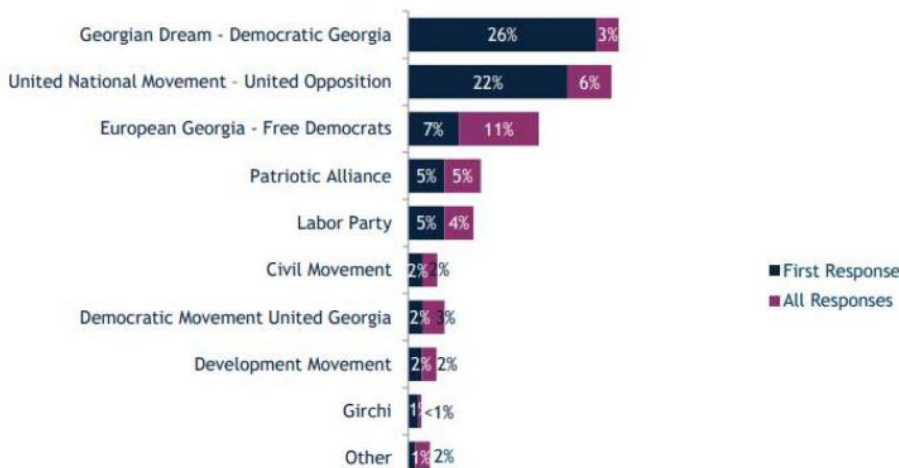
Paata Salia, the new Director-General of Rustavi 2, says that the request of journalists about setting up a Public Board was not satisfied.

Salia made this statement after the meeting with the journalists. As he noted he took this decision after consulting with the owner of the channel Kibar Khalvashi.

"This form does not provide any guarantee. This is not the form that is necessary for gaining the trust between us. We will continue working and I think gradually all of them will see that their demands will be fulfilled and no guarantee, except our trust, will be needed" – Paata Salia said.

Journalists of Rustavi 2 requested to create a Public Board, which would provide the editorial independence of the journalists. Journalists requested to stuff the Board by the following persons: Eka Gigauri, Sul Khan Saladze, Giorgi Mshvenieradze, Mikheil Benidze, Nata Dzvelishvili, Nino Danelia, Zviad Koridze and Lasha Tugushi (*1TV, July 21, 2019*).

14. IRI: 26% would vote for GD and 22% for UNM if elections were held coming Sunday



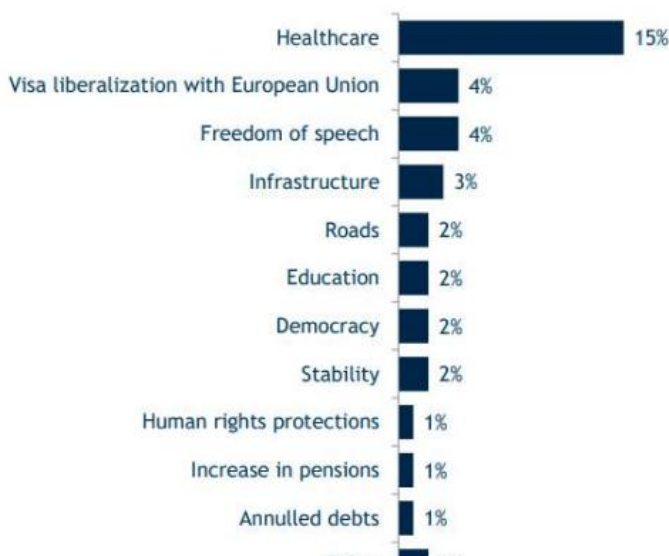
According to the results of IRI public opinion survey, 26 percent of respondents would vote for “Georgian Dream” and 22 percent for “United National Movement”, if elections were held this coming Sunday.

The result of other parties is as follows: “European Georgia” – 7 percent, “Alliance

of Patriots” – 5 percent, “Labor Party” – 5 percent, “Civic Movement” – 2 percent, “Democratic Movement for United Georgia” – 2 percent, “- 2 percent,” “Girchi” - 1 percent, the other – 1 percent, none – 6 percent, Don’t know – 22 percent.

The survey was conducted on behalf of the International Republican Institute’s Center for Insights and Survey Research by Dr. Rasa Alisauskiene of the Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organization, with the fieldwork carried out by the Institute of Polling & Marketing. Data was collected throughout Georgia between May 20 and June 11, 2019, through face-to-face interviews at respondents’ homes. The nationally representative sample consisted of 1,500 permanent residents of Georgia aged 18 or older and eligible to vote. The margin of error does not exceed plus or minus 2.5 percent for the full sample, and the response rate was 68 percent. The survey was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (ITV, July 19, 2019).

15. IRI survey: Healthcare reform named as the main accomplishment of Georgian Government



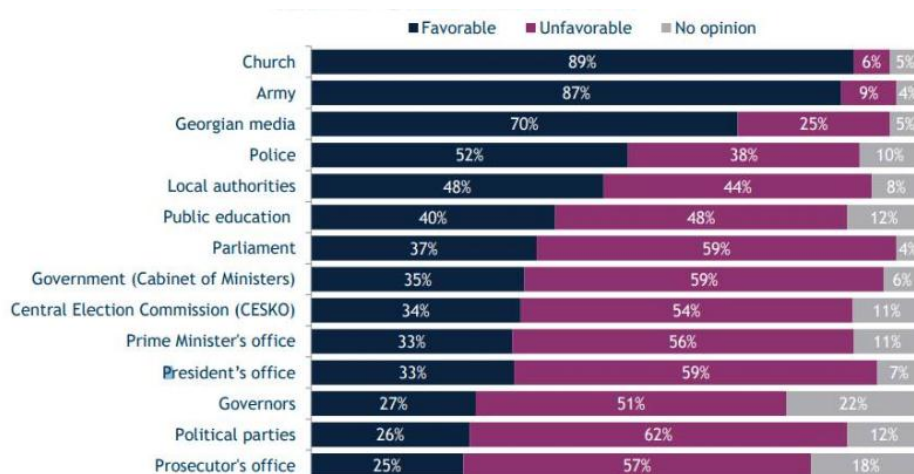
Citizens named the healthcare reform as the main accomplishment of the current Government of Georgia. This is the results of research by the International Republican Institute (IRI), – the International Republican Institute’s (IRI) published the results of the public opinion survey of Georgian citizens.

To the question – What is main accomplishment of the current Government? – healthcare reform was named by 15 percent of respondents. 4 percent said that –

Visa liberalization with the European Union, 4 percent – freedom of speech, 3 percent – infrastructure, 2 percent – roads, 2 percent – education, 2 percent – democracy, 2 percent – stability, 1 percent – human rights protections, 1 percent – increase in pensions, 1 percent – annulled debts, 2 percent – other.

Twenty-six percent of respondents struggled to name a government accomplishment, and 35 percent said that the government had no accomplishments.

16. IRI: Church and army lead in credibility rating



According to IRI public opinion survey, the credibility rating of the church is 89 percent, and the army is 87 percent.

As for other institutions the figures are as follow: Georgian media – 70 percent, police – 52 percent, local authorities – 48

percent, public education – 40 percent, parliament – 37 percent, cabinet of ministers – 35 percent, the CEC – 34 percent, the Prime Minister’s office – 33 percent , the President’s Office – 33 percent, governors – 27 percent, political parties – 26 percent, prosecutor’s Office – 25 percent, National Bank – 25 percent, the courts – 23 percent, trade unions – 18 percent.

17. Protest to continue at Rustaveli Avenue

Protests in front of the parliament building at Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi have been held since June 20 in reaction to the visit of Sergey Gavrilov, a Russian lawmaker and his sitting in the parliamentary speaker’s chair during a religious assembly, which many Georgians saw as an unwelcome reminder of Russian military occupation of its breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The demand of resignation of Minister of Internal Affairs Giorgi Gakharia has remained unchanged of the protest in front of the parliament building since June 21 after the so-called Gavrilov Night when the protest was dispersed by the riot police with the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon. About 240 people both civilians and law-enforcers were injured during the night of June 20-21 (1TV, July 21, 2019).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

18. Georgia’s Foreign Trade in January-June 2019

Trade turnover with the European Union (EU) member states stood at USD 1.5 billion, which is a 4.6% decrease over the same period of last year. Exports from Georgia to the EU-member states increased by 16.1% y/y to USD 426.9 million, while imports constituted USD 1.1 billion, which is 10.8% lower than last year.

Trade turnover with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) decreased by 0.5% y/y to USD 2 billion. Georgia’s exports to CIS countries were up by 27.1% y/y to USD 916.2 million, and imports decreased by 15.6% to USD 1.1 billion.

Turkey remains Georgia’s largest trading partner with USD 843 million in January-June of 2019, followed by Russia, Azerbaijan, China and Ukraine with USD 677.8 million, USD 508.9 million, USD 483.6 million and USD 304.6 million, respectively.

They are followed by Armenia with trade turnover of USD 274.7 million; United States – USD 268.5 million; Germany – USD 237.7 million; Bulgaria – USD 209.9 million; Romania – USD 203.9 million.

Russia tops the list of largest trading partners by exports with USD 261.3 million, followed by Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Armenia and Ukraine with USD 211.3 million, USD 149.1 million, USD 147.7 million and USD 129.4 million, respectively.

Turkey, China, Russia Azerbaijan and Germany are the top trading partners of Georgia in terms of imports with USD 722.1 million, USD 430.7 million, USD 416.5 million, USD 297.6 million and USD 210.7 million, respectively (*Civil.ge, July 19, 2019*).

19. Fuel price increased at majority of Petrol Stations

The fuel price has increased by 0.05 GEL at the majority of Petrol Stations across Georgia. The price for 1 liter of regular type petrol at Gulf network is 2.54, at Socar Petroleum Georgia – 2.53 GEL, Rompetrol – 2.54 GEL, Wissol – 2.59 GEL (*ITV, July 20, 2019*).

Additional Information

July 22, 2019
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.8845 GEL	1 GBP - 3.6177 GEL	100 RUB - 4.5787 GEL
1 EUR - 3.2410 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5109 GEL	100 JPY - 2.6803 GEL

Monday
22 July



20° 35°

Tuesday
23 July



22° 32°

Wednesday
24 July



21° 33°

Thursday
25 July



19° 33°

Friday
26 July



19° 31°

-  [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](#)