

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

September 12-16

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Date: **September 17, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. **Vladimir Zelensky says that he is caution about issue of peacekeepers in Donbas to prevent scenario of Abkhazia and Transnistria**

"I very carefully consider the issue of the peacekeepers in Donbas. I know that the previous authority discussed this issue. I am cautious because I do not want the scenario of Abkhazia or Transnistria to take place in Donbas when peacekeepers stationed at the dividing line and stayed there. Therefore, I do not raise the issue of peacekeepers. However, I agree with the idea of deployment of the peacekeepers on the Russia-Ukraine border" – Zelensky said.

The Ukrainian president called on the international community to maintain sanctions against Russia. As he noted sanctions is the main way to regain the territories of Ukraine (*1TV, September 13, 2019*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (*so called South Ossetia*)

2. **US Department of State: We once again call on Russia to suspend its illegal occupation of Georgian territory**

The United States once again calls on Russia to suspend its illegal occupation of Georgian territory. Morgan Ortagus, Spokesperson of the US Department of State wrote about it on her Twitter page.

"We once again call on Russia to suspend its illegal occupation of Georgian territory and fulfill its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement. For the last decade, Russia's illegal, malign behavior has undermined stability and peace in the region", – stated the representative of the US Department of State (*1TV, September 12, 2019*).

3. **Carl Hartzell: New circumstances along occupation line contain risks and bring undesirable consequences for stability**

"I personally and all EU structures are very worried. Obviously, we have constant communication with each other, I mean EUMM and the EU Special Representative. The new circumstances contain risks and bring undesirable consequences for stability. Therefore, I think it should be taken seriously and the EU Special Representative will try to inform Brussels in order to maintain stability and prevent deterioration", – Carl Hartzell said (*1TV, September 13, 2019*).

4. **Madeleine Moon: We thank Data Vanishvili for his courage to come and explain what cruel and inhumane conditions are here**

The President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Madeleine Moon has arrived in Khurvaleti village which is adjacent to the occupation line.

The representatives of Georgian authorities briefed Madeleine Moon about the situation on the ground. They also provided information concerning other sections of the occupation line, including developments in the villages of Gugutiantkari and Chorchana.

NATO PA President spoke with Data Vanishvili, who had been left beyond the occupation line, and thanked him for his courage (*1TV, September 13, 2019*).

5. GID co-chairs – The ongoing closure of crossing points on the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia causes an escalation

Co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) have released a statement on the ongoing closure of crossing points on the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia.

‘The ongoing closure of crossing points on the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia is creating additional hardship for the local people and is further raising tensions. We are in contact with all relevant actors, urging them to abstain from taking unilateral steps that have negative humanitarian consequences for conflict-affected people and undermine stability on the ground’,- the GID co-chairs stated (*1TV, September 15, 2019*).

6. Hubert Knirsch: Human rights violations in occupied Akhagori and Chorchana village deserve attention

“We are observing the situation along the administrative boundary line, and we are also in touch with the EU Monitoring Mission. We know that the situation in Chorchana village has not been resolved yet. Within the framework of the Geneva International Discussions, a joint statement has been made in connection with the human rights violations and the grave conditions. Of course, it deserves much attention”, – said Hubert Knirsch, Ambassador of Germany to Georgia (*1TV, September 16, 2019*).

7. EUMM publishes press release regarding situation at Administrative Boundary Line

The information notes that the EUMM is closely monitoring events in the area of Chorchana-Tsnelisi on the South Ossetian Administrative Boundary Line (ABL). Mission patrols have maintained a constant presence in that area since 24 August. Due to the level of press interest in the situation and in order to dispel certain inaccurate reports, the Mission would like to share the following information.

According to press release, beginning in January this year the Mission noted paint markings on trees in the area between Tsnelisi and Chorchana. The Mission assesses these as a feature of ‘borderisation’. However, no actor has claimed responsibility for these markings (*1TV, September 16, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

8. James Appathurai: I’ve seen the current exchanges in Georgia on joining the Alliance without Article 5 applying to the two regions, I don’t see an appetite in NATO to consider this

“I’ve seen the current exchanges in Georgia on joining the Alliance without Article 5 applying to the two regions. In my view, there is no point in a discussion of this issue now. I don’t see an appetite in NATO to consider this, nor do I believe the current international security environment makes this idea timely. The Georgian embassy to NATO is actively promoting more Georgia in NATO, and more NATO in Georgia, with clear and concrete ideas. This is the right approach, politically and practically. And the NAC will soon be in Georgia to discuss how to further deepen our cooperation, including to help

Georgia with the reforms that help it prepare for membership”, – James Appathurai wrote on facebook (1TV, September 12, 2019).

9. European Union writes about launching the European School in Georgia

According to the press release, the European Union, together with the Government of Georgia, launched the European School in Georgia, the first European School outside EU borders.

“The joint initiative will lead to the establishment of a school for Georgian students, as well as students from across the region, to follow a unique education model based on European and international values of multiculturalism, peace and tolerance”, – the statement reads.

The official launch ceremony was presided by EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, and Giorgi Gakharia, Prime Minister of Georgia (1TV, September 15, 2019).

10. Johannes Hahn: European School is example of cooperation, friendship and recognition of European values

“I am very happy to be back here a year after the inauguration of this school. It is the first school that will be established outside the EU countries. We do our best to make the school multilingual. Most importantly, the school has European values, students will receive Diploma of European standards recognized by all universities around the world, ” – said Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations.

Johannes Hahn along with Georgia’s Education Minister Mikheil Batiashvili and Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze will set a symbolic capsule at the construction site of the School’s building at Lisi Lake (1TV, September 15, 2019).

11. Giorgi Gakharia: EU integration process will bring more results to Georgia

“Of course, we talked about the occupation. We thanked the EU for the representation and for the function that they carry out along the occupation line. Nevertheless, we also noted that both sides need to do our best to make sure that EUMM mandate covers the entire territory. It should enable the protection of basic security and human rights for our citizens. We also talked about further continuation of the democratization process and we agreed that basic democratic functions and values will be protected and further deepened in the country”, – Prime Minister stated after the meeting with the EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn (1TV, September 16, 2019).

12. Johannes Hahn: Advantage of the European Union is that we are sometimes bothering in a way, but we are reliable partners

“Once again, thank you for your hospitality. Thank you for your support and commitment concerning the European School. I have to say it was a particular project of mine and I am grateful that we could finally implement it first here – in Georgia. We have chosen Georgia as a pilot plot a couple of years ago for this initiative and having today met the second class and first class of this specific European High School, was a great event for me personally and I will stay committed to the interests of Georgia. I have the intention to visit Georgia even in the future – at least once a year to see the progress and in particular progress of the European School” – said Hahn after the meeting with Georgian Prime Minister (1TV, September 16, 2019).

13. Urmaz Reinsalu: Russia should be held accountable for its aggression against Georgia and Ukraine

"If we consider the West's logic, there is a risk that a mistake will be made for the third time. Too weak a stance — in Georgia — encouraged [Russia] to cut its teeth first in Crimea, then in Luhansk, then Donetsk, and if these don't come with too serious of a price tag, just a frozen conflict in which the West unilaterally displays powerlessness, then this paves the way for a third interventionist adventure somewhere in the world", – Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia said (*1TV, September 16, 2019*).

14. Salome Zurabishvili and Ilham Aliyev held phone conversation

A phone conversation was held between Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili and President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. The Press Office of the President of Georgia released this information.

As information notes, Salome Zurabishvili thanked Ilham Aliyev for opening a Georgian school in the village of Alibeglo, Kakhi district.

"For his part, Ilham Aliyev reaffirmed Azerbaijan's support to Georgia, as a friend and strategic partner of our country.

Salome Zurabishvili also thanked Ilham Aliyev for supporting Georgia's candidacy in the election process of the head of the European regional bureau of the World Trade Organization", – information released by Press Office of the President reads. Salome Zurabishvili invited the President of Azerbaijan to Georgia (*1TV, September 16, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

❖ ODIHR publishes report on the First Phase of the Nomination and Appointment of Supreme Court Judges in Georgia

"The recruitment to fill the 20 Supreme Court seats was open to all eligible citizens and yielded 144 applicants, with 38 per cent women. The law does not clearly and sufficiently regulate recusals for conflict of interest and two HCJ members refused to recuse themselves despite inlaw relations with applicants.

The HCJ did not adopt procedures for assessing the applicants' qualifications or for conducting the short-list vote. HCJ members were given five days to evaluate the applicants before, through a secret ballot, the pool was reduced to 50 candidates.

Following the vote on the short-list, the Public Defender issued statements raising serious concerns about voting patterns identified in the analysis and making strong allegations of colluding amongst the majority of HCJ members to split votes to ensure a specific 45 applicants were short-listed. These allegations, which were echoed by some civil society organizations, further diminished confidence in the process.

The HCJ is not required to provide a reasoned explanation of the decisions taken on shortlisting, determining the ranking, or the final selection of the 20 candidates to be put up for nomination. Therefore, the opportunity for legal redress is significantly hindered. Further, the right to effective legal remedy against HCJ's actions and decisions is not sufficiently guaranteed in the legal framework. This left the nomination process under the final authority of a judicial oversight body, rather than a court of

law, challenging OSCE commitments and international standards,” – reads the report (ODHIR, September 10, 2019).

15. Mamuka Khazaradze establishes new public movement 'Lelo'

“Now we are in Anaklia, this is the place where the so-called border separates us from our brothers, Abkhazians; this is the closest point of our country to Europe; the place where a new turning point has to be emerged in Georgian reality. Anaklia is a place where the huge project of enormous potential has to be implemented and is being implemented; where many jobs will be created and it is an opportunity for Georgia to regain its function in the neighborhood, in the region and a decent place on the world map once and for all.

We are now in the place that is the last gateway between Georgia and Europe, the last gateway between Asia and Europe and that is where our direction, the direction to the West, must be consolidated once and for all”, – Mamuka Khazaradze said (1TV, September 12, 2019).

16. Georgian First Channel fell victim of a cyber-attack

As a result of the cyberattack, a virus was spread in the broadcaster's network, encrypting and destroying important files kept on the servers.

The spread of the virus to other servers has been avoided at this time. Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia is informed about this fact (1TV, September 12, 2019).

17. Maia Tskitishvili and Tea Tsulukiani to hold the posts of Vice Prime Minister

“First of all, I would like to wish success to the ministers who rejoined our cabinet, Vakhtang Gomelauri and Irakli Gharibashvili. We will have two Vice Prime Ministers in our Cabinet, Maia Tskitishvili and Tea Tsulukiani. They are long-serving and experienced members of our government, thus I am sure that this will further empower our team”, – said Giorgi Gakharia.

In addition, Executive Government Meetings will be regularly held at 10 every Thursday morning in line with a decision of the Head of Government of Georgia (1TV, September 13, 2019).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

18. Georgia on 12th place in World Economic Freedom Ranking

Georgia has ranked 12th among 162 countries according to Economic Freedom of the World annual report prepared by Fraser Institute. Georgia moved one position upward in comparison to the same rating of the previous year. The country has improved its ranking score (7.94) as well.

The index published in Economic Freedom of the World measures the degree to which the policies and institutions of countries are supportive of economic freedom. The countries are evaluated in five main directions: Size of Government, Legal System and Property Rights, Sound Money, Freedom to Trade Internationally and Regulation.

19. In August, the number of visitors from Russia decreased by 6% and from EU increased by 23%

According to data published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Azerbaijan was the leading countries with respect to the number of visitors to Georgia – 248 083 in August. The growth in comparison to the same period of last year is 16%.

Russia went to second place, 252 873 citizens arrived in Georgia from this country. The number of visitors from Russia in comparison to the same period of last year has decreased by 6%.

The number of visitors from the European Union increased by 23% in comparison to the same period of last year.

In August the total number of international tourists, who visited Georgia in comparison to the same period of last year, has increased by 5.8 % (ITV, September 13, 2019).

20. Daily Mail - 'Georgia, it's a secret gem!'

Georgia, it's a secret gem! – Daily Mail published an article under this title. As the author of the article Hugo Brown says, 'the former Soviet stronghold is now an easy-going and fascinating destination for history lovers'.

"John Steinbeck described himself as being 'out-eaten, out-drunk, out-danced and out-sung' in Georgia. On a visit with war photographer Robert Capa in 1948, he said its people had an undeniable spirit. Over the course of Georgia's complex history that spirit has been tested, with invasions by Russia the Turks, Persians and Mongols" – reads the article (September 15, 2019).

Additional Information

September 17, 2019
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 USD - 2.9608 GEL | 1 GBP - 3.6874 GEL | 100 RUB -4.6206 GEL |
| 1 EUR - 3.2699 GEL | 1 TRY - 0.5179 GEL | 100 JPY - 2.7481 GEL |

| Tuesday 17 September | Wednesday 18 September | Thursday 19 September | Friday 20 September | Saturday 21 September |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 14° 27° | 15° 28° | 15° 31° | 15° 27° | 10° 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](#)**