

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

September 17-18

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## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### 1. Elizabeth Rood – US calls on Russia for fulfillment of 2008 ceasefire agreement

"We call on Russia for fulfillment of the obligations as per the 2008 ceasefire agreement and withdraw its forces. We are also concerned about the fact that the checkpoints are closed at the administrative border line that worsens the humanitarian situation of those residing beyond the area. Therefore, we urge the de-facto South Ossetian authorities for opening the checkpoint," Rood said (*1TV, September 17, 2019*).

### 2. NDI Survey - 78% of interviewed support Georgia's EU membership, 71% support Georgia's joining NATO

Results of the poll carried out by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) indicate that 78 percent of Georgians support the country's goal to join the European Union (EU).

According to the same survey, 14% of the interviewed respondents say that Georgia's EU membership "is not acceptable," while 8% do not have the answer.

Also, based on the poll, 71% of respondents support Georgia's becoming a member of NATO. The 17% of those interviewed said that Georgia's NATO membership 'is unacceptable' while 11% has no answer to the question.

The fieldwork of the survey was carried out in the period of July 13-29 based on face-to-face interview principle and random selection of 2 131 respondents across Georgia (except the occupied regions). The margin of error is +/- 2-3%. NDI surveys are carried out by CRRC Georgia with the financial support of UK Aid (*1TV, September 17, 2019*).

### 3. Foreign Ministry releases statement about attack on Saudi Arabia oil facilities

Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement about the attack on two key Saudi oil facilities by drones on September 14.

The Ministry said that it slammed the attacks on the terminal and refinery belonging to Saudi Aramco Company. "The Georgian Foreign Ministry believes that any act of terrorism and extremism is unacceptable that contributes to the escalation of the conflict and negatively affects peace and stability in the region," reads the statement.

The facilities came under attack at 04:00 (01:00 GMT) on Saturday. Analysts have identified at least 17 hits. An unnamed senior US official told ABC News the attacks on the Abqaiq refinery had involved a dozen

cruise missiles and more than 20 drones. Reportedly, the fires led to the interruption of an estimated 5.7 million barrels in global oil (*1TV, September 17, 2019*).

#### **4. Swiss Secretary of State – Every application of a Georgian asking for asylum from Switzerland will be rejected**

“Georgia deserves visa liberalization and citizens should travel to the Schengen area without a visa, we supported it from the very beginning, though measures have been taken to ensure that all Georgians, who are considered asylum seekers in Switzerland and appeal us, will definitely get rejected we make them return to Georgia. This is what helps Georgia to maintain the visa-free regime with the EU,” Swiss Secretary of State Mario Gattiker said at a news conference.

During the news conference, Swiss Secretary of State also spoke about the problem of the illegal migration and the Declaration on Migration, which was signed in Tbilisi on September 16, 2019, by the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Vakhtang Gomelauri (*1TV, September 17, 2019*).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **5. Justice Minister – One of the persons pardoned by President is wanted**

One of the persons pardoned by President is wanted – Tea Tsulukiani, Justice Minister and Vice Prime Minister of Georgia said in “Free Vision” Program of Georgian First Channel.

“Unlike previous two years, no contact has taken place between the Presidential Administration and Justice Ministry on the occasion of Pardoning for Virgin Mary Day. We received an order signed by President and 23 prisoners out of 24 were released from a penitentiary facility. One inmate was not released since he has been wanted for the time being,” Tsulukiani said.

According to Justice Minister, the right of pardoning cannot be unlimited otherwise the act can lead to regrettable results as it happened in case of pardoning for Virgin Mary Day when three persons convicted for murder were released from prison (*1TV, September 18, 2019*).

#### **6. Justice Minister – The right of Pardoning cannot be unlimited**

According to Justice Minister, the reform regarding pardoning is essential and talks with President over the issue have taken place several times.

“We all agree that there are faults regarding the pardoning system. The procedure is not as transparent as required. President believes that membership of the Pardoning Commission has to be reconsidered as well,” Tsulukiani said.

Georgia’s President Salome Zurbishvili pardoned Aslan Bezhanidze, a person convicted for the murder committed in 2004. Bezhanidze was detained in 2016. He was wanted for 12 years. Bezhanidze was acquitted based on the decisions of Tbilisi City and Appeals Court. The Supreme Court found Bezhanidze guilty and imposed imprisonment with a term of 6 years and 9 months.

Bezhanidze was released from the penitentiary facility on August 28, Virgin Mary Day. President pardoned 34 prisoners in connection with Virgin Mary Day including a convict charged for the murder of a police officer (*1TV, September 18, 2019*).

## **7. President declares Moratorium on Pardoning**

President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili declared a moratorium on Pardoning of convicts – President announced about the decision during a news briefing held at Presidential Administration.

“I as President declare a moratorium on pardoning until the rules for pardoning are changed and newly determined,” Zurbashvili said.

President said that she had heard many speculations about interference of certain people in the pardoning procedure including President’s Parliamentary Secretary that was not correct (*1TV, September 18, 2019*).

## **8. MP of European Georgia Party – Declaration of Moratorium on pardoning is irresponsibility**

Declaration of Moratorium on pardoning on part of President is irresponsibility – Elene Khoshtaria, MP of European Georgia Party said.

According to Khoshtaria, the main problem was not in the pardoning system itself and the signs of corruption or nepotism might not exist either.

Khoshtaria said that she had expected President to provide arguments about pardoning of a prisoner convicted for the murder but instead President suspended the process of pardoning (*1TV, September 18, 2019*).

## **9. PM – Pardoning of a police officer’s murderer and murderer, in general, is absolutely unacceptable**

Pardoning of a police officer’s murderer and a murderer, in general, is absolutely unacceptable for me – Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said in an interview with journalists.

Gakharia commented about the declaration of a moratorium on pardoning by President Salome Zurbashvili.

According to PM, pardoning is the discretion of the president and that legislative changes have to be made regarding the issue. “There should be some filters so that persons convicted for grave crimes and especially for murder should not be pardoned,” Gakharia said (*1TV, September 18, 2019*).

## **10. “Euronews Georgia” established**

A new Georgian-language news channel and a digital platform “Euronews Georgia” was established today through the agreement of Silknet and Euronews. President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili attended the presentation.

According to the Presidential Administration, the idea to establish “Euronews Georgia” came to President’s mind during the meeting with the shooting team of Euronews being on a visit in Tbilisi 6 months ago.

According to President, the establishment of Euronews Georgia is a big step forward for Georgia since media represents the foundation of democracy in any democratic country.

“We will receive from Euronews not only programs but European standards essential to the Georgian media space. I hope that by the establishment of the channel, European professionalism, attitude to unbiased information and European straightforwardness will enter Georgia,” President Zurbashvili said (*1TV, September 18, 2019*).

## **11. Kartu Foundation to fully finance construction of Kutaisi International University**

For the first time after the restoration of independence, a new Georgian state university has been established that is a historic event – Nikoloz Chkhetiani, Founder of Kutaisi International University and Chairman of the Board of Cartu Foundation said during the presentation of a new educational space established by Cartu Foundation and Kutaisi International University (*ITV, September 18, 2019*).

**12. Bidzina Ivanishvili - In 2012, I publicly promised the Georgian society that we would build a university in Kutaisi. Today we can all see the first phase of construction is coming to its end**

“For a country like ours, education is the main resource that may serve as the basis for development. Eleven years ago, my family and I started thinking and dreaming about creating a modern and powerful technological education hub in Georgia that would be a breakthrough in the Georgian educational and scientific space.

In 2012, I publicly promised the Georgian society that we would build a university in Kutaisi. Today we can all see the first phase of construction is coming to its end and in September 2020, the first wave of students will move to the building. This is important, of course, but today we need not just another university, but a place of higher education where the quality of education will be in line with international standards. That is why, together with the best specialists in this field, we have been actively working in this direction for several years and have achieved significant results,” Ivanishvili said (*ITV, September 12, 2019*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

**13. NDI Poll - 63% of interviewed believes that Georgia’s economic situation is bad**

Based on the poll carried out by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), 63% of interviewed respondents believes that Georgia’s economic situation is bad.

Out of those, who took part in the survey, 31% thinks that the economic situation does not change, while 4% considers that Georgia’s economic conditions are positive.

Laura Thornton, NDI’s Resident Director in Georgia said during the presentation that the attitude of the population about the economic situation determines their viewpoint that the country is developing in the wrong direction.

The fieldwork of the survey was carried out in the period of July 13-29 based on face-to-face interview principle and random selection of 2 131 respondents across Georgia (except the occupied regions). The margin of error is +/- 2-3% (*ITV, September 17, 2019*).

**14. IMF evaluates dynamics of Georgia’s economic indexes as positive**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) evaluates dynamics of Georgia’s economic indexes, sustainability of the speed of economic growth and other macroeconomic parameters as positive – Head of the IMF Mission Mercedes Vera-Martin said during the meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia.

According to the Head of the IMF Mission, Georgia showed sustainability against worsened external factors.

Georgian PM reiterated the Georgian government's readiness to expand cooperation and partnership with the IMF in the future. The IMF Mission will arrive in Georgia with the next visit in October of 2019 (*1TV, September 17, 2019*).

### **15. IMF leaves prognosis of Georgia's economic growth unchanged**

"The basement of Georgian economy is sustainable although the economic environment in the first half of the year was less supportive," Head of the IMF Mission Mercedes Vera-Martin said.

In the press release, the IMF evaluated the dynamics of Georgia's economic indexes, sustainability of the speed of economic growth and other macroeconomic parameters as positive and said that Georgia showed sustainability against worsened external factors (*1TV, September 18, 2019*).

### **16. U.S. allocates \$700,000 to establish a new Pediatric Hematology-Oncology Center in Tbilisi**

The U.S. has allocated \$700,000 to establish a new Pediatric Hematology-Oncology Center in Tbilisi – reads the statement posted on Facebook page of the U.S. Embassy in Georgia.

"No child should ever get sick, but sadly, they sometimes do. In order to help Georgia develop a state-of-the-art center for comprehensive cancer treatment, the U.S. Government awarded Global Healing and the Jo Ann Medical Center \$700,000 to establish a new Pediatric Hematology-Oncology Center in Tbilisi," reads the statement.

The new Pediatric Hematology-Oncology Center in Tbilisi will be established on the bases of Jo Ann Medical Center under the patronage of President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili (*1TV, September 18, 2019*).

## **Additional Information**

**September 19, 2019**  
**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.9691 GEL	1 GBP - 3.6989 GEL	100 RUB - 4.6131 GEL
1 EUR - 3.2797 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5224 GEL	100 JPY - 2.7441 GEL

  

Thursday 19 September	Friday 20 September	Saturday 21 September	Sunday 22 September	Monday 23 September
				
13° 29°	16° 26°	9° 21°	9° 20°	10° 22°

  

-  **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](#)**