

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

September 19-23

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Date: **September 24, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. **Russia holds military training in occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region**

As Kavkazski Uzel reports, the training is conducted on the polygons in southern Russia, as well as in Armenia and in the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region. The maneuvers include 10,000 military personnel, as well as artillery, UAVs and aviation.

The 50 planes and helicopters, 2,000 units of military equipment, as well as 20 UAVs and Intelligence equipment are used as part of the training (*1TV, September 19, 2019*).

2. **Georgia's Patriarchate – Congratulation of so-called Abkhazian president in 'elections' by Russian Patriarch can be considered as encouragement of separatism**

The Public Relations Service of Georgia's Patriarchate commented about the released information based on which Russian Patriarch Kirill congratulated the so-called Abkhazian president Raul Khajimba on winning in the 'elections.'

According to the Patriarchate, the Russian Patriarch's move can be considered as the encouragement of separatism that hinders the aspiration of peaceful relations between Georgians and Abkhazians.

"Although there is no congratulatory letter of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church available on the official webpage of the Patriarchate of Moscow, the fact has not been denied on Russia's part. We want to make our standpoint clear: Abkhazia is Georgia's ancient territory and it can be perceived only in the unity of Georgia's boundaries," reads the statement (*1TV, September 20, 2019*).

3. **Vladimir Putin issued an order on modernizing so-called armed forces of occupied Abkhazia**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has issued an order aimed at modernizing the so-called armed forces of occupied Abkhazia.

According to Vladimir Putin's decision, Russia will allocate funds for modernization of the so-called armed forces of occupied Abkhazia.

Before signing the document, Moscow and the puppet regime of occupied Abkhazia will hold talks. The occupied region of Georgia was recognized as independent state by the Russian authorities on August 26, 2008 (*1TV, September 21, 2019*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (*so called South Ossetia*)

4. **PM – Latest developments across occupied regions worsen security environment in the region**

The latest developments across Georgia's occupied regions worsen the security environment in the region and therefore, raising the issue by the international community in high-level formats is important – Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said during the meeting with Ambassador Rudolf Michalka, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus and co-chair of Geneva International Discussions (GID).

According to Press Service of Georgian Prime Minister, the sides discussed violation of human rights, discrimination facts of ethnic Georgians, illegal borderization and destructive moves of the occupational forces near Chorchana village of Khashuri Municipality (*ITV, September 21, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

5. Giorgi Gakharia discussed the need of raising the issue of occupied territories at high level of international formats with Ambassador of Germany

Government of Georgia has been highly appreciating the support of Germany since regaining its independence and stands ready to further deepen the current partnership, – Giorgi Gakharia, Prime Minister of Georgia stated at a meeting with H.E. Hubert Knirsch, Ambassador of Germany to Georgia today.

According to the Press Office of Prime Minister, the focus was made on the major directions of bilateral cooperation, close partnership within multilateral formats. Ongoing cooperation in the area of education was underlined, along with the significance of financial and technical assistance (*ITV, September 19, 2019*).

6. Davit Zalkaliani: At the initiative of Mike Pompeo, Georgia will take part in a meeting of transatlantic foreign ministers

"I will have the opportunity to participate in the ministerial, including high-level event launched by EU 'Good Human Rights Stories Initiative'. This event considers the examples of successful countries that have had tangible results in terms of democratic reforms and human rights. At the previous event, Georgia was recognized as a leader. This year we will have the opportunity to talk about our reforms", – Minister said.

Georgia has been invited by the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to participate in the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Transatlantic States. This is the second year when Georgia has been officially invited to this event and this is once again recognition of Georgia as one of the most successful aspirant countries by Euro-Atlantic partners", – Minister said (*ITV, September 19, 2019*).

7. Second stage of meeting of commissions on delimitation and demarcation of Georgia-Azerbaijani border begins

The second stage of the meeting of experts of commissions on delimitation and demarcation of the Georgia-Azerbaijani border has begun, – the Georgian Foreign Ministry reports in that regard.

According to the Ministry, experts of both countries will examine the remaining sections of the Georgia-Azerbaijani borderline and conduct geodetic and measuring works.

"These works are scheduled to be implemented for September 27, after which the results will be presented for the next meeting in Tbilisi. The exact date of the commission meeting will be agreed

between the parties through diplomatic channels”, – the information released by Foreign Ministry notes (*1TV, September 23, 2019*).

8. North Atlantic Council to visit Georgia on 3-4 October

“The Deputy Secretary General and the NATO Permanent Representatives will also hold meetings with the President of Georgia Ms. Salome Zourabichvili, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Vakhtang Gomelauri, the Minister of Defence, Mr Irakli Garibashvili, as well as with the Chairman of the Parliament, Mr. Archil Talakvadze and Georgian Parliamentarians. The NATO Ambassadors will furthermore have a working lunch with Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani, meet with civil society representatives and visit two Georgian coast guard vessels, – press release reads (*1TV, September 23, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

9. NDI: Performance of church (64%) and Justice Houses (57%) named as the best among public institutions

According to a survey published by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC), the performance of the Georgian Orthodox Church (64 percent) and Justice Houses (57 percent) was named as the best among public institutions.

In addition, 53 percent of respondents assess the activities of the Georgian army positively and 42% of the respondents like police activities. 10% of the respondents are very satisfied with the work of the court (*1TV, September 19, 2019*).

10. Based on NDI poll Parliament has the highest rate of negative evaluation

According to the survey, 32 percent of respondents evaluate the work of the Georgian parliament as bad, and 10 percent as very bad. 39 percent of respondent evaluated activities of legislature organ as average, 8 percent evaluate the work of the Georgian parliament as good (*1TV, September 19, 2019*).

11. According to NDI survey, 20% of respondents vote for 'Georgian Dream', 9% for 'National Movement' if parliamentary elections be held tomorrow

According to the survey, to question which party would you vote for if parliamentary elections be held tomorrow, 20% of respondents answered Georgian Dream, 9% said they would vote for the United National Movement, 4% – European Georgia- Free Democrats. 26 percent of respondents did not answer the question.

The results reflect data collected from July 13-29, 2019, through face-to-face interviews with a nationwide representative sample of Georgia’s adult population, excluding occupied territories. A total of 2,131 people were interviewed. The margin of error is +/- 2-3 percent (*1TV, September 19, 2019*).

12. 60% of respondents assess government’s performance negatively

According to a survey published by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC), 60 percent of respondents assess the government’s performance as ‘bad’, 32% evaluate it as – “well” (*1TV, September 19, 2019*).

13. 11 people detained for illegal production-distribution of pornographic materials and trafficking of minors

Officers of the Central Criminal Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, General Prosecutors` Office, Europol and officers of the law enforcement agencies of the United States of America and Australia as a result of jointly held intensive operative-investigative activities revealed the network involved in minors trafficking and production-distribution of materials containing pornography of minors, consequently, 11 members of the organized criminal group were detained. The detainees include parents of minors, their relatives and acquaintances, as well as the owners and employees of the illegal photo salon (*ITV, September 19, 2019*).

14. Australian citizen arrested on charges of child pornography and trafficking imposed pre-trial detention

"The Australian citizen is charged with both producing and distributing juvenile pornographic materials and child trafficking. The criminal case contains evidence proving the alleged criminal act", the prosecutor said. As for the defendant, according to his lawyer, he uses the right to silence (*ITV, September 20, 2019*).

15. Public Defender: If we do not get answers, what arguments were the basis for pardoning, the investigation should be interested in it

The President or President's administration must provide additional arguments about the process, by whose initiative and base on what arguments this pardoning took place, – Georgia's Public Defender Nino Lomjaria commented about the fact of pardoning by President of prisoners.

The Public Defender says pardoning is the president's prerogative, but human rights law and the Strasbourg court's case say that the state's punishment should not be unreasonably lenient in murder cases.

"If we do not get the answers from the President, what arguments were the basis for pardoning, of course, the investigation should take an interest in this" – Nino Lomjaria said (*ITV, September 19, 2019*).

16. General Prosecutor's Office launches investigation into pardoning of convicts by President

The General Prosecutor's Office has launched an investigation into the pardoning of convicts by President Salome Zourabichvili.

According to the agency, the investigation was launched into alleged abuse of power in the pardoning procedure.

"The Prosecutor General's Office of Georgia has launched an investigation into the alleged abuse of power in the process of pardoning of convicts – Ramaz Devadze, Aslan Bezhanidze, Zurab Nadiradze and others," the agency says.

President of Georgia Salome Zurabishvili pardoned 34 prisoners in connection with Saint Marry Day on August 28 including three convicts charged for the murder and one person wanted by law enforcers (*ITV, September 20, 2019*).

17. Whether President will be questioned with regard to the pardoning of convicts

"Unfortunately, in this country, a reaction occurs only when there is great public protest. I think that if an investigation has been launched, the president of Georgia should be questioned within the framework of the investigation into the pardoning of convicts, otherwise, the investigation will be merely formal. As for corruption, unfortunately, the President still has not yet explained based on what

principle these 30 cases were selected out of several thousand people's cases, "- said Eka Gigauri, Director of Transparency International (*1TV, September 23, 2019*).

18. Dimitri Gabunia claims that he does not know who drawn up list on pardoning

"I was on vacation from August 9 to September 3 and learned about it from the media. There are corresponding department and deputy head of the corresponding administration. I expect the results of the investigation, conducted by the prosecutor's office, to find out what happened. I am absolutely not involved in this. I declare it with full responsibility", – he President's Parliamentary Secretary Dimitri Gabunia said.

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19. PM – I was the first Minister of Internal Affairs who gave evidence in prosecutor's office and will be the first Prime Minister to do so

Gakharia said that the Prosecutor's Office would decide how many people had to be detained and whose responsibility would be raised regarding the June 20-21 developments in Tbilisi.

According to Gakharia, June 20 was "Gavrilov Night" but it was the night of the attack on the parliament. "Every police officer managed to protect the state institution that night and served the state and performed an official duty. There was certain excess of power and investigation continues," Gakharia said.

Prime Minister said that those political forces which were calling on protesters for intrusion in the parliament building with force also had to claim the responsibility for their activities (*1TV, September 20, 2019*).

20. Protests organized by "It's a Shame" ends

Protests organized by "It's a Shame" movement decided to end their rallies today three months after the so-called "Gavrilov Night."

According to organizers, the government slapped a new challenge to the public by appointing Giorgi Gakharia, former Minister of Internal Affairs on the post of Prime Minister.

The movement today will present a new action plan on how to weaken the ruling Georgian Dream Party before the 2020 parliamentary elections.

"We should continue struggle so that 2020 elections are held in a free and transparent environment without any pressure and fear," Giga Makarashvili, one of the organizers said (*1TV, September 20, 2019*).

21. Tent set up at parliament in support of persons detained into case of June 20-21 developments

A tent has been set up at the parliament in support of Irakli Okruashvili, Leader of Victorious Georgia Party and other persons detained into the case of June 20-21 developments in Tbilisi.

Representatives of Victorious Georgia Party claim that the tent will not be removed until all the detainees are released from imprisonment.

Investigation accuses Okruashvili of organizing mass violence. Two other persons Giorgi Javakhishvili and Tornike Datashvili are detained based on the same charge.

Okruashvili was imposed to imprisonment on July 27. The three charged persons were left in imprisonment based on the decision made by a judge on September 19 (*ITV, September 21, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

22. Exports from Georgia to CIS countries increased by 24% and to EU by 25%

According to Geostat, In January-August 2019 the external merchandise trade (excluding non-declared trade) of Georgia amounted to USD 8 126.1 million, 0.01 percent higher year-on-year. The exports equaled USD 2 411.6 million (12.4 percent higher), while the imports stood at USD 5 714.5 million (4.4 percent lower).

In January-August 2019 the exports to the CIS countries stood at USD 1 274.0 million (24.2 percent higher compared to January-August 2018) and reached 52.8 percent of total exports.

In January-August 2019 the exports from Georgia to the EU countries amounted to USD 571.1 million (25.3 percent higher compared to January-August 2018) and constituted 23.7 percent of total exports (*ITV, September 19, 2019*).

23. Russia, Sweden, Ireland, Japan and Turkey are leading in terms of roaming costs in Georgia

Russia, Sweden and Ireland are leading in terms of roaming costs in Georgia. The top five also includes Japan and Turkey. This information has been published by the National Communications Commission of Georgia.

According to the agency, in 2019, roaming subscribers of Russian mobile operators spent 666,295 GEL, Sweden – 534,854 GEL, Ireland – 505,157 GEL, Japan – 408,860 GEL, Turkey – 239,838 GEL (*ITV, September 19, 2019*).

24. Revenue from tourism sector decreased by 10.6%

According to the National Bank of Georgia, in August of the current year, state revenue from the tourism sector amounted to \$ 396.1 million.

In August of 2018, this figure amounted to 442.9 million dollars. Accordingly, in comparison to the same period of last year, revenue decreased by 10.6% (*ITV, September 19, 2019*).

25. Giorgi Gakharia: Transformation of country into a transport and logistics hub is a priority of Georgian Government

Government of Georgia welcomes effective and productive cooperation with the World Bank, within the scope of which country has benefited of significant funding, – Giorgi Gakharia, Prime Minister of Georgia said at a meeting with Sebastian Molineus, Regional Director of the World Bank for South Caucasus today.

According to Prime Minister's Press Office, the head of Government stressed the support demonstrated by the World Bank, which has made it possible to significantly improve the infrastructure in the country and helped in the implementation of substantial projects in such sectors as energy, agriculture, regional and municipal development. According to the Prime Minister of Georgia, transformation of the country into a transport and logistics hub is a priority of the Government of Georgia, thus making the greatest focus on the projects of regional magnitude (*ITV, September 23, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

26. Nagoya Mayor performed Elvis Presley's song for Georgian Rugby team [\[Video\]](#)

Prior to the Rugby World Cup, various festive events with the participation of teams competing in the tournament are being held in all host cities of Japan.

Members of the Georgian national team had an official meeting in Nagoya. World Rugby Chair Bill Beaumont and Mayor of Nagoya Takashi Kawamura also attended the event. The captain of the Georgian rugby team Merab Sharikadze addressed the guests.

At the ceremony Mayor of Nagoya dedicated Elvis Presley's song 'Can't help falling in love' to Georgian team. He performed his own interpretation of the song: Can't help falling in love with the team of Georgia" (1TV, September 19, 2019).

Additional Information

September 24, 2019
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.9709 GEL	1 GBP - 3.6940 GEL	100 RUB - 4.6462 GEL
1 EUR - 3.2632 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5194 GEL	100 JPY - 2.7644 GEL

Tuesday 24 September	Wednesday 25 September	Thursday 26 September	Friday 27 September	Saturday 28 September
				
11° 23°	15° 26°	15° 26°	15° 27°	14° 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](#)**