

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

October 3-6

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❖ **Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)**

1. Tskhinvali occupation regime to raise issue of dismantling checkpoint at Geneva Discussions

Tskhinvali occupation regime plans to raise the issue of dismantling the police checkpoint at Tsnelisi village during the Geneva Discussions.

According to representatives of the occupation regime, "the discussion will be held in a very unstable time, when the Georgian side is escalating the situation on the border section near Tsnelisi village."

"We hope that a logical and diplomatic solution will be found out of the current situation," representatives of the occupation regime say. The 49th round of the Geneva International Discussions is scheduled for October 8–9 (*ITV, October 5, 2019*).

2. Gwendolyn Sasse: Conflict resolution is long-term process that requires appropriate political conditions

Ahead of the official visit of the President of the Federal Republic of Germany to Georgia, the Georgian First Channel interviewed the Director of Center for Eastern Europe and International Studies in Berlin Gwendolyn Sasse, who spoke about the "Steinmeier formula".

"It is important not to put the conditions existing in Ukraine and Georgia in the same context. In general, these different conflicts have much in common. This may be the temporary status of disputed territories. But relations between Tbilisi and Moscow again remain vague. In addition, we also talk about the ending of the hot phase of the war in Ukraine, border control and the withdrawal of troops. The situation in Georgia shows that after war problems still remain unsolved and it evidences how long such conflicts can last. Given this, even after Ukraine's consent to "Steinmeier formula" or at the next round of Normandy Format we should not expect rapid resolution of the conflict in Ukraine. This is a long-term process that requires appropriate political conditions both in Moscow and in Tbilisi and Kyiv" – Gwendolyn Sasse said (*ITV, October 5, 2019*).

❖ **Foreign Affairs**

3. David Zalkaliani: NATO highlights Black Sea security context by holding NAC meeting in Batumi

Black Sea security is becoming increasingly important in NATO-Georgia relations, – Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani told reporters in Batumi ahead of the North Atlantic Council's visit.

According to David Zalkaliani, this year is unprecedented in terms of Georgia's NATO integration and today's event is the culmination of this intensive relations.

The Foreign Minister says that the visit of the NATO Secretary-General to Georgia this year, as well as the arrival of the North Atlantic Council, is an important message for the country, it is political support from NATO (*1TV, October 3, 2019*).

4. Giorgi Gakharia: Against a backdrop of strengthening of Russia at Black Sea, NATO's presence is critically important

"This is the fifth visit of the North Atlantic Council to Georgia. This is a direct indication of Alliance's support for Georgia. On behalf of the Georgian government, I would like to thank you. I would like to offer my thanks to each NATO member for supporting Georgia's territorial integrity and independence within internationally recognized borders, and most importantly for the development of our democratic institutions. A strong relationship with NATO is the foundation of Georgia's foreign policy and its security. Visiting Batumi is symbolic as a new space has recently emerged in collaboration between NATO and Georgia which is related to Black Sea security. We all comprehend that the safe Black Sea is a guarantee of a safe Euro-Atlantic space. Since Russia has strengthened at the Black Sea, after the annexation of Crimea, NATO's presence in the Black Sea is critically important", – Gakharia said (*1TV, October 3, 2019*).

5. NATO-Georgia Commission Statement: NATO and Georgia should refresh Substantial Package in 2020

"The NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) met at Ambassadorial level in Batumi today with the participation of the Georgian Prime Minister. Allied Ambassadors and Georgia emphasize the unique scope and depth of Georgia's relationship with the Alliance. Allies welcome the substantial progress on reforms in Georgia over the past decade in consolidating its democracy and achieving stronger economic development, more effective defence institutions, and modernised defence forces. The new Georgian Government is committed to continue implementing these reforms. We recognize the sacrifices and contributions the Georgian people have made to our shared security. These efforts, along with Georgia's participation in EU-led operations, demonstrate Georgia's commitment and capability to contribute to Euro-Atlantic security. NATO and Georgia are ready to further enhance this cooperation. Building on the success of the last five years, Allies have agreed that NATO and Georgia should conduct a refresh of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP), to be delivered during 2020, to update and improve the package. Allied Ambassadors reiterate their full support for Georgia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. We call on Russia to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia." – reads the statement (*1TV, October 3, 2019*).

6. Giorgi Gakharia: We expect that cooperation, transformed into Georgia's highest compatibility with NATO, finally be translated into real results

Cooperation between NATO and Georgia is becoming increasingly important in the context of Black Sea security, – Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia made this statement at a joint press conference with NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller. The Prime Minister thanked Rose Gottemoeller for unwavering support and friendship (*1TV, October 3, 2019*).

7. Rose Gottemoeller: We agreed to improve Substantial Package, Allies committed to provide further resources

"We welcomed the substantial progress on reforms in Georgia. You are capable to implement reforms in defence sphere and modernize defence forces. You have achieved significant progress in terms of defence spending. We encourage you to continue on this path", – NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller made this statement after the meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission in Batumi (*1TV, October 3, 2019*).

8. Georgian Defense Minister meets with NATO Deputy Secretary General in Batumi

Georgia's Defense Minister Irakli Gharibashvili met with NATO Deputy Secretary-General Rose Gottemoeller at the Hilton Hotel in Batumi city of Adjara region within the framework of the visit of the North-Atlantic Council (NAC).

As the Press Service of Georgian Defense Ministry informs, Gharibashvili thanked Gottemoeller for strong support to Georgia's path on the Euro-Atlantic integration.

The sides talked about the implementation of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP), ongoing reforms in the armed forces and Georgia's participation in international peacekeeping missions under NATO aegis.

The fifth visit of NAC in Georgia will end today. The permanent representatives of NATO member states are becoming introduced with Georgia's reforms and progress in strengthening of Georgia's defense capabilities.

The North-Atlantic Council (NAC) arrived in Georgia at the invitation of the Georgian government. The delegation includes permanent representatives of 29 member states of NATO and is headed by Deputy Secretary-General of NATO Rose Gottemoeller (*1TV, October 4, 2019*).

9. Minister of Internal Affairs – MIA is responsible for security in the Black Sea Region

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for the security in the Black Sea region and our ships are involved in the process to strengthen the country's security – Vakhtang Gomelauri, Minister of Internal Affairs said in Batumi city of Adjara region.

Gomelauri, together with Deputy Secretary-General of NATO Rose Gottemoeller and Defense Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, visited the two Georgian coast guard Highland vessels handed over to the Georgian side by the U.S.

"The visit of the North-Atlantic Council in Batumi is very important. This is a clear signal of NATO's support to Georgia," Gomelauri said.

On the question of whether other member states of NATO planned to hand over more offshore supply vessels to the Georgian side, Minister of Internal Affairs said that the Georgian government was working on the issue (*1TV, October 4, 2019*).

10. President of Georgia – Georgia keeps moving forward to the goal for being a part of the Euro-Atlantic Community

Your visit to Georgia is yet another possibility to confirm our national aspiration to become integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions and European family. Our culture, history and values determine the Georgian population's efforts and support to the European Union and NATO. Georgia was lucky to have the support of NATO countries on its path to democratic development. Georgians acknowledge and appreciate results of your constant support," Zurabishvili said (*1TV, October 4, 2019*).

11. Foreign Minister – German President is not bringing any initiative to Georgia

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier is not bringing any initiative to Georgia and this is merely speculation – Davit Zalkaliani, Minister of Foreign Affairs told journalists.

Foreign Minister commented about the Steinmeier's Formula (a potential way to reinvigorate negotiations with Russia recently suggested to Ukraine) and confirmed the information about the forthcoming visit of Steinmeier.

"Frank-Walter Steinmeier has no initiatives about the resolution of conflicts in Georgia, this is merely speculation," Zalkaliani claimed, and added that the visit of German President to was planned during the visit of Georgian President to Germany (*1TV, October 4, 2019*).

12. Speech of Russian MP in PACE interrupted by activists

Activists spread flags of Ukraine, Georgia, Poland and Crimean Tatars when Pyotr Tolstoy, a member of Russia's delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), was delivering a speech in the PACE session hall. They demanded Russia stopped the aggression.

The Russian lawmaker tried to continue his speech but the protest was encouraged with applauses. The PACE was discussing the issue of suppressing protests in Russia (*1TV, October 4, 2019*).

13. Number of international visitors increased by 2.8% in September

The number of international visitors in September of 2019 was 917 044 that is an increase by 2.8% in comparison to the same period of the last year. The number of tourist visits is increased by 0.6% – The National Tourism Administration informs.

However, the number of international visitors from Russia decreased by 20.6% in September. Germany, the UK, Poland, France and the Netherlands were leading with respect to the countries of the European Union (*1TV, October 4, 2019*).

14. Foreign Ministry – US Foreign Operations Law envisages increase in budgetary allocations to Georgia

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia reports that based on the draft-bill adopted by the United States Senate Committee of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, the budget to be allocated to Georgia for 2020 is increased.

The money as envisaged by the 2020 fiscal budget for Georgia is increased and amounts USD 132 025 000. Moreover, the draft-bill envisages allocation of USD 258 million for European and Eurasian countries including Georgia for support of their western integration (*1TV, October 5, 2019*).

15. Frank-Walter Steinmeier arrived in Georgia with official visit

President of the Federal Republic of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier has started his official visit to Georgia.

The plane of the German President landed at Tbilisi International Airport, where he was greeted by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Davit Zalkaliani.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier has arrived in Georgia with an official visit together with his wife Elke Budenbender.

The official hosting ceremony will take place at the Presidential Residence. The Georgian and German presidents will hold meetings in face-to-face and expanded formats. The two presidents will then make joint statements for the media (*1TV, October 6, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

16. Former producer of political programs at Rustavi 2 questioned at Prosecutor's Office

Nodar Meladze, former producer of political programs and head of Information Service at Rustavi 2 TV Company was questioned at Prosecutor's Office this afternoon.

Meladze told journalists after questioning that the investigation was interested in whether or not he had been receiving bonus salaries. He said he presumed that the investigation process aimed at arresting of Nika Gvaramia, former General Director of Rustavi 2 and now Head of Mtavari TV.

"The question asked was according to which principle the personnel was receiving bonuses and my answer was simple – based on the rating brought to the TV channel," Meladze said (*1TV, October 5, 2019*).

17. President of Georgia – You can kill me, I will not comment about pardoning

"I have no right to make explanations about pardoning. You can kill me but I will not comment about the issue," President told journalists. President was seen in the center of Tbilisi in connection with the annual Tbilisona celebration.

The General Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the pardoning of convicts by President Salome Zurbishvili on September 20 on charge of alleged abuse of power in the pardoning procedure (*1TV, October 5, 2019*).

18. Prime Minister comments about pardoning

The pardoning of a police officer's murderer and in general, of any person convicted for a grave crime is absolutely unacceptable for me – Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia told journalists.

According to PM, the system of pardoning requires making amendments on a legislative level and the parliament and the public have to hold discussions to approve the changes (*1TV, October 5, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

19. Giorgi Gakharia: Bank system saves 700 million foreign currency resources, which should be directed to economy

"Coordinated work should continue in the future, as we face many challenges in the economy, such as the GEL's exchange rate, which has a direct impact on the daily lives of our citizens in the social context. But I would like to note that the coordinated work between the government and the National Bank will continue in line with their mandates and will be even more effective on a daily basis", – Giorgi Gakharia said (*1TV, October 3, 2019*).

20. EBRD approves \$60 Million for Kvesheti-Kobi Project

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) approved \$ 60 million financial resources to co-finance the construction of a 9km tunnel located on the Jinvali-Larsi Road (North-South Corridor).

According to the Ministry of Infrastructure of Georgia, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has already allocated a \$415 million for construction of Kvesheti-Kobi road and tunnel, and the state co-financing will be US \$ 83.6 million. A new 23-km bypass road from Kvesheti to Kobi will be built to allow more traffic to travel on it safely, and will remain fully operational all year; it will also provide 5km of all-weather rural roads that will serve roadside villages. The Project will include five tunnels with a total

length of about 11.6 km (the longest of which is about 9 km), and six bridges with a total length of about 1.6 km (*1TV, October 3, 2019*).

21. Russian airline companies ask compensation from government due to suspended flights to Georgia

Russian airline Pobeda has asked the Ministry of Transport of Russia to clarify deadlines on when they will receive compensation for the financial loss the company has experienced due to the Russian-initiated suspension of direct flights to Georgia in July, Ekho Kavkaza reports.

The agency cites the source as saying that the airline has experienced up to eight million USD in losses because of its suspended flights to Tbilisi and Batumi, which came after the June scandal in the Georgian parliament, involving Russian MPs (*1TV, October 4, 2019*).

Additional Information

October 7, 2019
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.9657 GEL	1 GBP - 3.6582 GEL	100 RUB - 4.5763 GEL
1 EUR - 3.2572 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5204 GEL	100 JPY - 2.7790 GEL

Monday 7 October	Tuesday 8 October	Wednesday 9 October	Thursday 10 October	Friday 11 October
				
11° 22°	12° 23°	12° 24°	13° 23°	14° 25°

-  **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](#)**