

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

November 15-17

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

1. Tskhinvali Sends Detained Georgian Doctor to Pretrial Custody

Tbilisi-based doctor, Vazha Gaprindashvili, who was detained by Russia-backed Tskhinvali region's "state security committee" near the occupation line with Akhagori Municipality several days ago, was sentenced to pretrial custody, the Georgian State Security Service confirmed.

According to media reports, prior to calling his wife and saying he was detained and transferred to Tskhinvali, Vazha Gaprindashvili told his family on November 9 that he was leaving Tbilisi for some business (*Civil.ge, November 15, 2019*).

2. President Calls for Releasing Georgian Doctor Detained in Tskhinvali

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili calls on the heads of international organizations "to use all available means" to achieve the release of Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili. Gaprindashvili, who "arrived in the [occupied Tskhinvali] region to perform his professional duties," was detained near the occupation line with Akhagori Municipality and later sentenced to pretrial custody in Tskhinvali.

In a statement, the President noted that "there is a severe crisis in the occupied Tskhinvali region and it has become even sharper today." Therefore, Zurbishvili called on the heads of international organizations to take necessary measures to improve the situation on the ground (*Civil.ge, November 16, 2019*).

3. Georgian MFA Statement on Doctor Gaprindashvili's Detention in Tskhinvali

Georgian Foreign Ministry reported on November 16 that it is "using all of its diplomatic tools" aimed at suspending illegal processes on occupied territories and improving human rights situation on the ground.

The Ministry released a statement following the decision of Russia-backed Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia authorities to sentence Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili to two-month pretrial custody for "illegally crossing the border." (*Civil.ge, November 16, 2019*).

4. U.S. Embassy in Georgia released statement on Detention of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili

The U.S. Embassy in Georgia released a statement about the detention of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili by the occupational forces.

The U.S. Embassy calls for the immediate release of Dr. Vazha Gaprindashvili, a well-known Georgian physician and president of the Association of Orthopedists and Traumatologists of Georgia, who was sentenced by the de facto authorities in Georgia's South Ossetia region on November 15 to two months of pretrial detention.

Additionally, we again call for the immediate end to closures of the crossing points along the administrative boundary line. We reiterate our full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders (*Civil.ge, November 16, 2019*).

5. Ketevan Tsikhelashvili - Vazha Gaprindashvili will be released in a few days

'Based on several reports, Vazha Gaprindashvili will be released in a few days,' – State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili said today. As she added, all agencies are involved to release Vazha Gaprindashvili (*Civil.ge, November 16, 2019*).

6. Patriarchate of Georgia calls for 'immediate release' of Georgian doctor

'We are deeply saddened by the imprisonment of Georgian doctor, the president of the Georgian Society of Orthopaedics and Traumatology Vazha Gaprindashvili.

Everyone knows this person as a highly experienced surgeon who has saved many people's health and lives.

Georgian doctors, civil society, authorities, embassies and international organizations have expressed support for Vazha Gaprindashvili. We join them and call for the immediate release of Dr. Vazha Gaprindashvili,'- the statement reads (*Civil.ge, November 17, 2019*).

7. The New York Times writes about Vazha Gaprindashvili

'Georgia on Sunday demanded the release of a doctor detained by separatists after crossing into breakaway South Ossetia, which is controlled by Russia after a war between two ex-Soviet republics in 2008.

Vazha Gaprindashvili, president of Georgia's Association of Orthopaedist and Traumatologists, was taken to South Ossetia's regional center Tskhinvali on Wednesday and given two months of pretrial custody by the separatists, Georgia's State security service has said. The separatists say he crossed over illegally.

Georgia's foreign ministry said Gaprindashvili's detention "highlights the alarming situation of human rights violations in the occupied territories". Local villagers are often detained on similar grounds but the doctor was a much more high-profile figure. Colleagues said he was trying to reach a patient.

"We have mobilized the international community and spare no efforts to ensure that our citizen, Vazha Gaprindashvili, returns to his family in a timely and safe manner," the ministry said in a statement",- The New York Times notes (*1TV, November 18, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

8. Georgian Citizen Charged with Terror Offences Arrested in Ukraine

The Ukrainian State Security Service reported on November 15 that Ukrainian police, in partnership with Georgian counterparts, arrested Georgian national, one of the commanders of Islamic State, Al-Bara Shishani, the same as Tsezar Tokhosashvili near Kyiv.

In its statement, the Ukrainian State Security Service said that Tokhosashvili was the deputy of Omar Al-Shishani, the same as Tarkhan Batirashvili, leader of the Islamic State operating in Syria. Following the latter's liquidation in 2016, Tokhosashvili left for Turkey.

According to the same information, in summer 2018, Tokhosashvili entered Ukraine with a fake passport, where he managed to coordinate the Islamic State units (*Civil.ge, November 16, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

9. Congressman Kinzinger Calls on Georgian Officials to Pass Constitutional Amendment

The United States Congressman and co-chair of the House Georgia Caucus Adam Kinzinger (Rep) said he was “shocked to hear about the collapse of promised reforms” in Georgia “after officials downvoted the move to a proportional election system.”

In a statement released on November 14, Kinzinger, who visited Georgia a week ago, said he was then “pleased by what seemed to be the inevitability of this reform package.” “This commitment was made to the international community, and most importantly, to the Georgian people. It is my hope that this situation can be fixed – and fixed very soon,” he stated (*Civil.ge, November 15, 2019*).

10. TI Georgia Alerts MEPs over ‘Democratic Backsliding’ in Georgia

Eka Gigauri, Executive Director of Transparency International Georgia addressed Members of the European Parliament, alerting them that Georgia is at “the lowest point in the democratic backsliding we were observing in the recent years.”

Gigauri’s letter follows the failure of the Georgian Parliament to pass the constitutional amendment envisaging transition to fully proportional electoral system from 2020 (*Civil.ge, November 15, 2019*).

11. Three Conservative MPs Quit Parliamentary Majority, Positions

Three lawmakers of the Georgian Dream–Conservatives faction announced about quitting the parliamentary majority group and their respective parliamentary positions on November 15, leading to dissolution of the six-member faction.

The list of MPs who quit includes Vice Speaker Zviad Dzidziguri, first deputy chair of the foreign relations committee Nino Goguadze; and leader of Georgian Dream–Conservatives faction Giga Bukia.

The decision comes a day after the Parliament voted down the constitutional amendment on transition to the proportional electoral system by 2020 (*Civil.ge, November 15, 2019*).

12. Ruling Party Denies Plans to Hold Snap Elections

Despite strong protests by opposition parties and civil rights activists, the ruling party announced it has no plans either to initiate the legislative amendments necessary for moving to the proportional electoral system or to hold snap elections.

Speaking at the news briefing on November 15, Parliamentary Chairman Archil Talakvadze reiterated that the current electoral system will remain in force till 2024. He expressed his regret that the bill on transition to the proportional system was voted down, but added that “this does not mean the end of the country, like the ruling party’s opponents want to portray it.”

“Let me assure you that the 2020 elections will be democratic and fair. We will work to successfully finalize the electoral reforms ongoing under OSCE recommendations, through constructive and normal political dialogue,” Talakvadze said (*Civil.ge, November 15, 2019*).

13. Davit Usupashvili sees adoption of German Model of elections as way out of current situation

Davit Usupashvili, former speaker of Parliament and founder of Development Movement, staffed by former members of Republican Party and National Forum, sees the adoption of the German Model of election system as the way out of the current crisis situation.

Usupashvili talked about the German Model of elections during the briefing. He said that the model was initiated in the parliament in 2016 and it required making changes in the Election Code by 76 votes to be approved.

According to Usupashvili, the German Model will satisfy the demand of proportional rule of elections and retention of Majoritarian constituencies at the same time (*Civil.e, November 15, 2019*).

14. Irakli Kobakhidze – So-called German Model is not compatible with Constitution

The so-called German Model of elections is not compatible with Constitution of Georgia – Irakli Kobakhidze, one of the leaders of the parliamentary majority said after the sitting of the parliamentary majority held at the central office of the ruling Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia Party earlier this afternoon.

Kobakhidze responded to the demand of the opposition to hold snap elections in the country and called on them to prepare for the 2020 parliamentary elections to be held in October of the next year.

"Georgian Dream will convincingly win in the elections. The opposition is speculating with the demand for snap elections. They had to voice any demand and could not come up with anything else. The opposition even cannot agree upon the demand they must voice," Kobakhidze said (*Civil.ge, November 15, 2019*).

15. Georgian CSOs, Civic Activists Urge European Socialists to Take 'Immediate, Adequate Actions'

29 local civil society organizations, including Transparency International, Open Society Georgia Foundation and UN Association of Georgia, together with 19 civic activists, urged the Party of European Socialists (PES), that includes Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party, "to take immediate and adequate actions" in response to the "grave challenges to the pluralistic and participatory democracy" in Georgia. In a statement of November 15 the signatories said that Georgian Dream's rejection of the constitutional amendment yesterday, "adds on to the ongoing state capture by the informal governor of Georgia and the chair of the party" Bidzina Ivanishvili (*Civil.ge, November 15, 2019*).

16. Former Ruling Party Lawmaker Leaves MP Mandate

Georgian lawmaker Sofio Katsarava who quit the parliamentary majority over the ruling party's failure to adopt promised constitutional amendment on Thursday, announced today that she is leaving her MP mandate.

Katsarava, who served as the chairperson of the Foreign Relations Committee until Thursday, wrote on her Facebook page that "I have made a very difficult decision today – but from my point of view, this is the only right decision – to leave the parliamentary mandate."

Katsarava is one of the twelve MPs who quit the ruling party and parliamentary positions after the parliament of Georgia has voted down the constitutional amendment envisaging transition to fully proportional electoral system from 2020 instead of 2024 (*Civil.ge, November 16, 2019*).

17. President, PM Regret Downvoting Constitutional Amendments

"When the society is healing from its wounds and, despite the weighty attacks on the Church, doesn't give in to despair, changes or the absence thereof in the electoral system cannot cause such a dramatic reaction and such outcome cannot be used to create a new wave of destabilization," **the President said.**

Zurabishvili brought examples of other countries, saying that there are different electoral systems in democratic countries and that “we cannot say that any of the systems is less democratic than the other.”

“Transition to the proportional system was a decision which needed certain procedures. Regrettably, this legislative amendment failed to gain the Parliament’s approval, but fortunately, we have included this initiative in the constitution and it will be implemented in 2024,” **Gakharia told reporters.**

Commenting on the rally outside the Parliament, Gakharia said that everyone enjoys the right to freedom of expression and “whatever happens, the state, police will protect the freedom of expression.” (*Civil.ge, November 16, 2019*).

18. Two Rallies Demand Snap Elections in Tbilisi; Parliament Blocked by Protesters

Two parallel rallies are underway in downtown Tbilisi today, both demanding fully proportional snap elections. The protest led by united opposition and civic activists outside the parliament building commenced on 3pm, while another rally with similar demands, led by Alliance of Patriots began on 5pm on the First Republic Square, few hundred meters away.

The protesters at the rally - “Everyone minus one! Bidzina [Ivanishvili] must go!” – outside the parliament are protesting the ruling Georgian Dream party’s failure to pass promised constitutional amendment that would switch Georgia to fully proportional electoral system from 2020, instead of 2024.

The protesters outside the parliament voiced their key demands:

- Snap parliamentary elections with fully proportional system;
- Resignation of the government; Provisional government to hold early elections;
- Release of June 20-21 events’ protesters from custody;
- New composition of the Central Election Commission (*Civil.ge, November 17, 2019*).

19. Georgian Opposition, Activists Block Parliament Entrances

As of 7pm, all entrances of the Georgian Parliament are blocked by the protesters that demand snap elections with fully proportional system. The leaders of European Georgia, United National Movement and New Georgia, as well as their supporters and civic activists erected tents outside three entrances of the Parliament building and padlocked its gates (*Civil.ge, November 17, 2019*).

20. EU Delegation, U.S. Embassy Release Joint Statement on Tbilisi Events

The Delegation of the European Union to Georgia and the U.S. Embassy to Tbilisi issued joint statement in the evening of November 17, saying that they “recognize the deep disappointment of a wide segment of Georgian society at the failure of Parliament to pass the constitutional amendments.”

The statement reads that “the decision taken last summer to accelerate the transition to proportional elections was understood as an important step forward in Georgia’s democracy, and there was political consensus behind it and a joint commitment from all sides to work towards this end.” (*Civil.ge, November 18, 2019*).








Additional Information

November 18, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.9723 GEL	1 GBP - 3.8265 GEL	100 RUB - 4.6531 GEL
1 EUR - 3.2779 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5169 GEL	100 JPY - 2.7352 GEL

Monday 18 November	Tuesday 19 November	Wednesday 20 November	Thursday 21 November	Friday 22 November
				
-1° 10°	2° 14°	3° 14°	0° 6°	0° 4°

-  **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](#)**