

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

November 25-27

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Georgian Students May Lose Gali Residency if they Study in Georgia

Abkhazia authorities that collaborate with Russian occupation ponder plans to “integrate” ethnic Georgian residents of Gali district through series of further restrictive measures, Temur Nadaraia, Gali district chief announced in an interview.

Speaking to Sukhumi-based “Nuzhnaya Gazeta”, Nadaraia said “the main task is to integrate population [of Gali district] into Abkhaz ethno-cultural and political space.”

He claimed, that although collaboration authorities took measures to establish local television and are opening a radio station, if the district residents “live in Abkhazia, but go abroad [to Georgia proper – Civil.ge] for shopping, wedding or work, you cannot achieve much with information tools.” (*Civil.ge, November 25, 2019*)

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

2. Georgian Orthodox Church Patriarch Ilia II Meets Foreign Diplomats Accredited in Georgia

Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Ilia II met with foreign diplomats accredited in Georgia on November 26.

In a statement released on November 25, the Georgian Orthodox Church noted that the Patriarch thanked foreign diplomats for supporting Georgia.

Ilia II also spoke about relations between the government and the opposition, expressing regret over the lack of mutual understanding between them and noting that “we should learn to listen to each other to achieve what our country needs.”

Metropolitan Shio Mujiri, the Georgian Patriarch’s locum tenens, who also attended the meeting, spoke about the situation in conflict regions and asked the diplomats to help in releasing Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili (*Civil.ge, November 26, 2019*).

3. Georgian CSOs Address CoE, PACE, ICRC over Human Rights Situation in Tskhinvali

A group of twelve Georgian human rights organizations have addressed the Council of Europe (CoE) Commissionaire for Human Rights, Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE), and International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), over the “deteriorating human rights situation” in the occupied territories of Georgia.

In a joint statement released on November 27, the group asked for the active emergency measures in response to “pending regrettable developments” in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, including the detention of a Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili (*Civil.ge, November 27, 2019*).

4. Russian ex-deputy FM: ‘we’re closely following developments around doctor Gaprindashvili’

Former Russian Deputy FM Gregory Karasin, who still represents Russia in economic talks with Georgia, says that his country, which exercises effective control of Georgia’s two occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, “is closely observing the situation” around a well-known Georgian doctor Vazha Garindashvili, who was abducted by Russian controlled occupation forces on November 9 (*Agenda.ge, November 27, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

5. Georgian Foreign Minister Visits Germany

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani is visiting Germany on November 24-26. Today, he addressed the 9th Berlin Foreign Policy Forum, speaking, among others, of “alarming security and human rights situation” in the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

In his remarks, FM Zalkaliani discussed recent detention and sentencing of a Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili in occupied Tskhinvali, which “demonstrates the grave humanitarian situation on the ground.” (*Civil.ge, November 26, 2019*)

6. Georgian, Russian Diplomats to Meet in Prague

Zurab Abashidze, Georgian Prime Minister’s special representative for Russia, and Russia’s former Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin, who became a member of Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of Russia in September 2019, but maintained his mandate to carry out a dialogue with Tbilisi, will hold a meeting in Prague on November 28, as part of the informal direct bilateral dialogue launched between the two countries in late 2012.

The two diplomats will meet amid aggravated situation between the two countries following the June 20 events, as well as recent tensions in the Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region following resumed borderization across the line of occupation, placement of additional police checkpoints by Tskhinvali and Tbilisi, Tskhinvali’s decision to close crossing points with the rest of Georgia, as well as detention of Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili by the occupation forces (*Civil.ge, November 27, 2019*).

7. Georgia Takes Presidency of Committee of Ministers of CoE

On November 27, Georgia has officially taken over the six-month presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) from France. Georgia will hold the presidency until May 15, 2020.

The new Chair of the Committee of Ministers, Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani introduced the priorities of the Georgian Presidency, which include human rights and environmental protection, civil participation in decision-making process, child-friendly justice and strengthening democracy through education, culture and youth engagement (*Civil.ge, November 27, 2019*).

8. EU HR Mogherini Sees ‘Risk in Georgia on Some Important Reforms’

Federica Mogherini, the European Union's outgoing High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy said in Strasbourg on November 27 that "today we see the risk in the country [Georgia] of backsliding on some important reforms in the rule of law area."

Speaking about the developments in EU's Eastern neighborhood in her opening remarks at the European Parliament, Mogherini noted that "Georgia is a close and reliable ally in the neighborhood, in our partnership, and it is precisely why we do not shy away when we see risks." (*Civil.ge, November 27, 2019*)

❖ Internal Affairs

9. Adjara Public TV Board Elects New Director

The Board of Advisors of Adjara TV and Radio company, a publicly-funded broadcaster based in Batumi, elected Giorgi Kokhreidze as the new director of the broadcaster for a term of three years. He was supported by three out of four members of the board – Giga Chkhartishvili, Tamila Dolidze and Soso Sturua. The fourth member, Tamar Tsilosani abstained.

In 2014-2018, Giorgi Kokhreidze was a member of the Board of Supervisors of Public Broadcaster. In 2005-2014, he served as the director of 202 TV. Earlier in 1999-2004, Kokhreidze was member of the Georgian Parliament, as well as the chairman of the parliamentary subcommittee on people with disabilities. Giorgi Kokhreidze is a founder of several non-governmental organizations working on the issues of people with disabilities.

The post of Adjara TV's director became vacant in April 2019 after the Board of Advisers impeached Natia Kapanadze. Four competitions were held since then to elect a new director. The most recent one was held in November among nine candidates (*Civil.ge, November 25, 2019*).

10. Georgia Ruling Party Ups the Ante, Mulls Switch to Fully Majoritarian Electoral System after 2020

Kakha Kaladze, the Secretary General of the ruling Georgian Dream–Democratic Georgia (GDDG) party, said after the parliamentary majority's meeting on November 25 that GDDG "has closed discussions" on amending the electoral system by the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Kaladze said, considering the current situation in the parliamentary majority, "there are no resources to mobilize 113 votes needed for a new constitutional amendment."

Importantly, he added that the ruling party "treats with understanding" the proposal voiced by its majoritarian MPs to hold the parliamentary elections through fully majoritarian system. This comes as dramatic change, since the Constitution – backed by the GD – envisages transfer to the fully proportional system starting 2024 polls. The opposition was demanding the proportional polls to take place already in 2020.

However, Kaladze claimed the party leadership has talked down the majoritarian MPs from tabling the change to fully majoritarian system already for 2020, with an understanding that they "will continue their deliberations in this direction and that the issue of electoral reform will be put for public plebiscite during the 2020 parliamentary or 2021 local elections." (*Civil.ge, November 25, 2019*).

11. Opposition Slams Ruling Party's Stance on Proportional Elections

The remarks made by Kakha Kaladze, the ruling party's Secretary General on November 25, according to which Georgian Dream has no plans to discuss a new initiative related to amending the electoral system, triggered strong criticism from opposition parties.

Civil.ge offers a compilation of assessments by opposition leaders:

Levan Bezhashvili, the United National Movement: "The government no longer controls the situation and fails to meet public requirements; therefore, they are trying to live in unreal world and dictate their conditions from there, but the reality looks absolutely different."

Giga Bokeria, European Georgia: "They are saying the same as before and nothing changes for us and the society. Strong protests will continue until these shameful leaders and their clowns continue to act this way. This protest may continue longer than desired for the country."

Eka Beselia, independent lawmaker: "The ruling party fails to understand problems. Their steps are directed towards further deepening of the crisis and enjoying their own power. This will end badly and our protest should be a response to it."

Nino Burjanadze, Democratic Movement – United Georgia: "They openly say that those people who make a deal with them will receive one or two seats in the Parliament. What are you doing? How can you mock at people this way? Young people will not stop. Even if we, political parties, go mad and agree on your deals, young people will not stop."

Khatuna Samnidze, Republican Party: The today's statement that majoritarian MPs will not be named in some constituencies proves that the government is afraid of the opposition's unity most of all. But our unity and protests will continue, our protests will expand."

Davit Usupashvili, Development Movement: "We know that the governments, who became even more stubborn and refused to change the electoral system, had to quit. So, if the government does not change anything, it will have to resign. Simply, we do not want to turn Georgia into a battlefield, where we will trample down everything – economy, stability."

Giorgi Gugava, Labor Party: "Kaladze and other swindlers from Georgian Dream will make the statements, which are attractive to them. We have our goals, our plan is unity. There will be blocking, demonstrations; we will fight for our country within the frames of the constitution."

Badri Japaridze, Movement Lelo: "Georgian Dream is ready to confront its own population to maintain power and foredoom the country for unrests. The today's statement is an absolutely unserious proposal. It is a threat to slow down the momentum, but it is an absolutely feeble attempt to cause a split; the opposition has a uniform position and protests will not decrease."

Nino Gogvadze, Free Democrats: "It was a threat, but I promise them that they will lose power in 2020 and this shameful majoritarian system will no longer exist in Georgia." (*Civil.ge, November 25, 2019*)

12. Riot Police Clears Parliament Entrances, Protest Continues

Police in riot gear have moved in around 5:00 to clear the Georgian Parliament entrances from behind the building and at the side streets from protesters, using water cannons. The Parliament session is scheduled

to take place today at 12:00. The Ministry of Interior reports 28 were arrested for resisting police. Three protesters are reported injured.

During the night, the police were preventing the protesters from lighting barrel-fires to resist sub-zero temperatures, an action that was deemed as obstructing the freedom of assembly by the Public Defender Nino Lomjaria.

Giga Bokeria, MP from the opposition European Georgia said the police are “fulfilling illegal orders”, and added that “everything that is happening here [during the protests] is a part of pressure we are making on these shameful clowns [in the parliament], they won’t get a normal life, they will have to walk under permanent riot police protection, they can not take that, and they will crumble.” (*Civil.ge*, November 26, 2019)

13. Amnesty International: Georgian Authorities Must Guarantee Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

“As the anti-government rally continues in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, the authorities must restrain from using unnecessary force against peaceful protesters,” according to the Amnesty International, London-based international human rights organization.

The two-page statement released on November 27, draws on the dispersal of two anti-government protests on November 18 and November 26 in central Tbilisi, during which riot police used water cannons and dozens of protesters were detained for allegedly unlawfully resisting police orders (*Civil.ge*, November 27, 2019).

14. Slamming NDI, IRI, Ivanishvili Says ‘U.S.-founded Institutions Devalued’ in Georgia

Speaking in a talk show with the pro-governmental Imedi TV on November 27, the leader of the ruling Georgian Dream party Bidzina Ivanishvili said “the reputation of the U.S. founded institutions such as NDI and IRI” is “being devalued” by the public opinion polls they publish.

“For years now the polls are being published. These are published by very serious organizations of our strategic partner [the U.S.]. And they no longer have public confidence, are often met with [ironic] smile,” Ivanishvili said.

“It’s not that we are afraid of these polls... It’s just as you said [- talking to the host] they are insistently published in circumstances of such low confidence....by NDI, or IRI...it seems that they [polls] serve a different purpose, it may be that some politicians want to convince our citizens, saying – look at the U.S. organizations, their bias is clearly seen, they don’t like the Georgian Dream and still support the [United] National Movement...[They would say] look, central, U.S. organization are consciously manipulating these [polls], so that they can demonstrate support to the National Movement and not the Georgian Dream,” Ivanishvili hypothesized, adding “I think neither of these [views] are without foundation. But if we look more generally, institutions established by our strategic partner are being devalued in our country,” Ivanishvili stressed (*Imedi TV*, November 27, 2019).

15. Man Dies after Locals Clash in Pankisi

One man died and three people were injured in a clash between locals in the village of Sakobiano of Akhmeta Municipality, the Georgian Interior Minister reported on November 27.

It also said that investigation has been launched under article 108 of the criminal code of Georgia, involving premeditated murder. Reginfo news agency, however, quoted locals as saying that there are two possible reasons of the clash.

According to one version, the murder of Visuri Mutoshvili, 36, may be linked to the construction of the third hydro power plant on the Khadori River that triggered clashes between local population and riot police in April 2019. According to the same reports, the victim's relative and his acquaintances were strongly against the construction of hydro power plants in Pankisi.

According to another version, the families of Mutoshvili and Kavtarashvili had a conflict resulting in clashes on various occasions. One of the persons who sustained injuries is a member of the Kavtarashvili family (*Civil.ge, November 27, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

16. Georgia and Czech Republic set on deepening economic ties

Georgia and the Czech Republic have discussed growing business and economic ties between these two countries, at the fifth Georgia-Czech Intergovernmental Economic Committee session in Prague, earlier today.

"Georgia and the Czech Republic are actively cooperating in areas such as energy, tourism, information technologies and innovative technologies," said Deputy Minister of Economy Genadi Arveladze.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture Khatia Tsilosani pointed out the importance of exporting Georgian wine, hazelnuts, Georgian honey and sea products to the Czech market and said that Georgian products can be distinguished by high quality and have the possibility to be highly exported to that market.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandre Khvtisiashvili noted the importance of legal employment of Georgian people in Czech Republic and said that the sides are actively working on that issue (*Agenda.ge, November 27, 2019*).

Additional Information

November 28, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.9754 GEL

1 GBP - 3.8326 GEL

100 RUB -4.6504 GEL

1 EUR - 3.2750 GEL

1 TRY - 0.5164 GEL

100 JPY - 2.7267 GEL

Thursday

2 May



12° 25°

Friday

3 May



13° 24°

Saturday

4 May



11° 17°

Sunday

5 May



11° 22°


Monday

6 May




13° 24°

 **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](#)**

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