

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

November 28 – December 1

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

Date: **December 2, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region (*so called South Ossetia*)

1. Another Georgian Sent to Pretrial Custody in Occupied Tskhinvali

Georgian citizen Genadi Bestaev, 51, was illegally detained by the 'security committee' (KGB) of Russia-backed Tskhinvali Region across the line of occupation, near Khelchua village, for "illegally crossing the state border" and "illegal drug smuggling" today.

According to the local agency "Res," Tskhinvali court sentenced Bestaev, native of village Zardiantkari of Gori Municipality, to two-month pretrial custody.

According to the same report, in the past, Bastaev was detained by Russia-backed Tskhinvali authorities for "similar offences" multiple times (*Civil.ge, November 29, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. Citizens of Switzerland can enter Georgia with an ID card

Citizens of Switzerland can enter Georgia with an ID card, Georgian PM has already signed an official document.

'Citizens of Switzerland can enter Georgia on the basis of a travel document, as well as an identity document showing a person's name, surname, date of birth and photo,' the official document reads. The resolution dated by November 28, 2019, is already in force (*ITV, December 1, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

3. Members of European Parliament on Developments in Georgia

On November 27, the European Parliament held a debate on developments in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries at its plenary session in Strasbourg.

Kati Piri (Netherlands, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats): "Large protests are currently held in Tbilisi since the government failed to deliver on its commitment to change the electoral code in 2020 to full proportional system. This promise was given to the Georgian voters and we expect all Georgian parties to deliver up to this promise. While Georgia did come a long way in democracy during the last few years, the current political crisis risk great instability in the country and that's something that Georgia can

simply not afford. We expect from all political parties [that] dialogue is initiated on how to solve the current deadlock.”

Anna Fotyga (Poland, European Conservatives and Reformists): “In Georgia, that is a matter of real concern, I’m really concerned by recent developments. I think the political crisis is extremely dangerous. We have to counter this.”

Petras Auštrevičius (Lithuania, Renew Europe Group): “I wish to express our concern on the situation in Georgia as well as to make it clear that we have to react to the situation in Tbilisi” (*Civil.ge, November 28, 2019*).

4. Parliament, Government Sessions Held amid Protests

The today’s sessions of the Parliament and the government were opened amid protests by civil rights activists and opposition parties.

Protesters gathered outside the Parliament and government buildings in the morning on November 28, trying to block their entrances, but failed to do so due to high police mobilization.

Unlike the previous days, today the Interior Ministry used iron barriers to block the streets leading to the Parliament and government buildings and deployed police cordon across the barriers (*Civil.ge, November 28, 2019*).

5. Government Assessed Ivanishvili’s Interview

Giorgi Gakharia, Prime Minister: “What I understood and what was important ... is that Mr. Ivanishvili frankly and openly answered the questions accumulated in the society. Most important for me was when he stressed how difficult it is to rule the country successfully through protection of democratic institutions, democratic procedures. This is the challenge and obligation, which we should fulfill. It is easy to rule the country, when you use the tools at disposal illegally, forcefully; it is difficult to rule the country in an absolutely democratic, free environment, where media is free, freedom of expression faces no threats, where we have such degree of democracy and freedom of expression that some people perceive storming the Parliament as freedom of expression. Let me emphasize again that the goals we saw in this interview are absolutely clear to me.”

Tea Tsulukiani, Deputy Prime Minister, Justice Minister: “It is very good that this interview was held... we once again heard that our future political life is just the elections of 2020 under mixed system as prescribed by the constitution... So, instead of running in the streets, it is better to get ready for the elections. The interview showed who Bidzina Ivanishvili is. He is the person who has no private interests for staying where he is now. He is the person for whom quick development of the Georgian state is a priority under its current conditions – occupation, economic problems and number one problem, employment. He discussed all these issues comprehensively during the interview.”

Maia Tskitishvili, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure: “What we heard yesterday was a very in-depth, necessary analysis and of course, I understand that opposition leaders do not like such analysis, but I am sure that it is very important for the population of our country to listen to such analysis from the party leader.”

Irakli Garibashvili, Defense Minister: "Mr. Ivanishvili frankly answered all the questions the society is concerned with, as well as responded to all absurd allegations and defamation from the most radical, destructive and extremist opposition."

Natia Turnava, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development: "The interview with the party chairman was very deep and it was a very frank analysis. In my opinion, many questions were answered and his analysis contained answers towards those politicians, who with their radicalism, try to cause destruction to the present development. For me, as for the Economy Minister, the part about employment was especially important, because actually, employment is the key priority of our government." (*Civil.ge, Agenda.ge, 1TV, November 28, 2019*).

6. Opposition Assessed Ivanishvili's Interview

Zaal Udumashvili, National Movement: "Yesterday, we watched the interview with Bidzina Ivanishvili, who was very frightened and as we guessed, he is most of all afraid of people's protest, people's loud statements."

Giga Bokeria, European Georgia: "If you let this man speak for a long time, he, as a rule, says almost everything what he has in his dangerously arranged head and what is dangerous for the country... If there are any sober-minded honest people in this country, who still doubt that removing this man from the government is a national task, watching this interview would be enough to see the problems caused to the country due to this man...Yesterday's interview reminded me of those Soviet era TV stories and interviews with Soviet leaders, that were exotic, from dark times, yet funny and tragic simultaneously... Years will pass and we will be shown this shameful interview as an exotic example of shameful situation in Georgia years ago."

Shalva Natelashvili, Labor Party: "Yesterday, the world saw the interview with bankrupted, inadequate, instable dictator, from which we can make the only conclusion that nothing will help this government except for resigning. So, they can do the only thing – to hold proportional elections and close the door." (*Civil.ge, 1TV, November 28, 2019*)

7. Former Georgian Dream Lawmakers Set up New Faction

Six lawmakers, who quit Georgian Dream's parliamentary majority at different times, among them Mariam Jashi, Levan Koberidze, Gedevan Popkhadze, Levan Gogichaishvili, Zviad Kvachantiradze and Koba Narchemashvili, will set up a new parliamentary faction of "Independent Lawmakers."

The faction will be chaired by Mariam Jashi, who quit the parliamentary majority and the parliamentary committee on education on November 14 as a sign of protest against the Parliament's decision to vote down the constitutional amendment on transition to fully proportional electoral system from 2020 (*Civil.ge, November 28, 2019*).

8. Ruling Georgian Dream Party, Opposition Meeting Proves Unsuccessful

Almost six-hour long meeting between the ruling Georgian Dream party and the opposition, which was held on November 30 upon the initiative of foreign diplomats accredited in Georgia and international partners and which aimed at reaching a consensus over amending the electoral system, proved unsuccessful.

The meeting follows over two weeks of protests and rising political tensions in Tbilisi and all across Georgia, triggered by Georgian Parliament's failure to pass the constitutional amendment on transition to fully proportional electoral system from 2020 on November 14. With voting down the amendment, the ruling party backtracked on its key promise to June 2019 protests (*Civil.ge, November 30, 2019*).

9. Justice Minister – German Model of elections is anti-Constitutional and no next debates will be held over this issue

Our irreversible standpoint is that the German Model of elections is anti-Constitutional and no next debates will be held about the issue – Tea Tsulukiani, Justice Minister said after the meeting held between representatives of the ruling party and opposition at Biltmore Hotel in Tbilisi.

According to Tsulukiani, detailed and deep discussions were held both in legislative and political aspects and Georgian Dream made it clear that Constitutional changes would not be made (*1TV, November 30, 2019*).

10. Grigol Vashadze – Today's meeting ended with no promising results

Today's meeting ended with no promising results, unfortunately – Grigol Vashadze, Leader of National Movement Party said after the meeting held between representatives of the ruling party and opposition at Biltmore Hotel in Tbilisi.

According to Vashadze, the ruling Georgian Dream party agreed on the meeting only because it was experiencing continuous pressure from Georgian citizens, opposition and strategic allies and was not intended to consider any compromise election model proposed by the opposition.

Also, Vashadze said that at the wish of mediators and international partners, the opposition was ready for the second round of negotiations. "We will never give the possibility to Georgian Dream to say that the opposition is not ready for talks," Vashadze said (*1TV, November 30, 2019*).

11. Giga Bokeria – Protest will continue

The government deserves political torture and protest will continue – Giga Bokeria, one of the leaders of European Georgia Party said after the meeting held between representatives of the ruling party and opposition at Biltmore Hotel in Tbilisi with participation of Diplomatic Corps.

According to Bokeria, protest rallies will keep on until the Georgian public gets what Bidzina Ivanishvili, Chairman of Georgian Dream Party and his team promised to people after the so-called Gavrilov Night and subsequent bloodshed (*1TV, November 30, 2019*).

12. Acting US Ambassador – Dialogue took place, we agreed that discussions will continue

I am glad that the dialogue took place – Acting US Ambassador to Georgia Elisabeth Rood said after the meeting held between representatives of the ruling party and opposition at Biltmore Hotel in Tbilisi with participation of Diplomatic Corps.

Acting US Ambassador said that many versions of election models were considered during the meeting and that the sides agreed to continue discussions (*1TV, December 1, 2019*).

13. Ombudsperson: Delayed Probe into Kerzaia Case Made Establishing Truth Impossible

Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria said on November 29 that the late investigation into the death of Ia Kerzaia, the principal of Public School N6 in Zugdidi, "made it impossible to establish the truth."

Ia Kerzaia died on December 9, 2018 after being reportedly pressured to join the campaign of ruling party-endorsed candidate Salome Zurabishvili in last year's presidential polls.

Two inspectors from the Ministry of Education carried out an inspection in the Public School N6 in Zugdidi, the capital of Western Georgia's Samegrelo region, in November 2018, ahead of the Presidential run-off. Kerzaia's family claims the inspection was launched after the school principal refused to cooperate with the authorities and declined to join the campaign of the ruling party-endorsed candidate, Salome Zurabishvili. The inspectors released their conclusion two weeks later, recommending the school's governing board to dismiss the principal. Kerzaia was hospitalized with a stroke on December 2, and died couple of days later. The family claims her health condition worsened as a result of pressure coming from the authorities. According to the case materials, Lavrenti Kiria filed a complaint with the Ministry of Education against Ia Kerzaia. It should be noted that the investigation has not proved the actual existence of a person with the mentioned name or the address specified by him (*Civil.ge, November 29, 2019*).

14. Lelo, New Rights, Development Movement Team up for Consulting Platform

Mamuka Khazaradze, Pikria Chikhradze and Davit Usupashvili, leaders of public movement Lelo, New Rights party and Development Movement, respectively, announced today about their plans to set up a consulting platform, adding that they will continue "an active struggle in common opposition format." Speaking at a news briefing on November 29, **Pikria Chikhradze of the New Rights party** said that "it will be a platform, which will be created by equal partners and which will defeat a bipolar system [of Bidzina Ivanishvili's ruling Georgian Dream party and ex-President Saakashvili's United National Movement – editorial note], enjoy public trust and build a strong, developed, democratic country." "I call on everyone to launch an active dialogue around this idea," she said.

Ex-Speaker of Parliament Davit Usupashvili, leader of the Development Movement, said that the country needs proportional elections and if "proportional elections are not held, we should be ready for any elections, at any time not to give any opportunity to those people, those forces, government for whom power has become a goal in itself and who are ready to sacrifice everyone and everything [for it]," Usupashvili said (*Civil.ge, November 29, 2019*).

15. President Zurabishvili Signs New Inmate Pardoning Rule

On November 26, Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili signed a decree on approving the new rule of inmate pardoning developed through the consultations with the Georgian Parliament and the Justice Ministry.

The new rule of pardoning provides new criteria and procedures for considering inmate cases and differs from the regulations approved by ex-President Giorgi Margvelashvili, which was in force from March 27, 2014 to November 26, 2019 (*Civil.ge, November 29, 2019*).

16. Supporters of GD party threw eggs and brooms to UNM office in Kutaisi

Supporters of Georgian Dream party are holding a protest rally outside the United National Movement office in Kutaisi.

Protesters threw eggs and brooms to UNM office, shouting 'Misha's slaves.' King Tamar Street in Kutaisi where the rally is taking place is blocked for the time being. Police are mobilized at the scene (*ITV, December 1, 2019*).

17. Cartu Bank bankruptcy case - Nika Melia was slapped with a 25 000 GEL fine for official misconduct

Tbilisi City Court has announced the decision Regarding the Cartu Bank bankruptcy case. Nika Melia, one of the leaders of the United National Movement was slapped with a 25 000 GEL fine for official misconduct. Herein, additionally, Nika Melia was deprived of the right to hold an official post for two years and three months.

As for Zurab Adeishvili, former Justice Minister, he was sentenced to imprisonment up to five years and three months. Nika Melia was not present at Tbilisi City Court. Today's trial was attended by the leaders of the United National Movement (*ITV, December 1, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

18. Geostat: GDP Growth 5.7% in October

Georgia's real GDP grew by 5.7% year-on-year in October, according to preliminary data released by the National Statistics Office (Geostat) on November 29.

According to the report, real growth was registered in the following sectors: manufacturing; hotels and restaurants; information and communication.

A decrease was reported in mining and quarrying; arts, entertainment and recreation activities. An average estimated real GDP growth equaled 5.1% for the first ten months of 2019 (*Civil.ge, November 29, 2019*).

19. Georgian PM, together with Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Ilham Aliyev, Inaugurates TANAP in Turkey

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, together with Turkish and Azerbaijani Presidents Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Ilham Aliyev, participated in an event celebrating the completion of TANAP.

As Prime Minister's Press Office notes, the official event took place in the Turkish province of Edirne. The leaders of the project's participant countries, by simultaneously pressing the start button, sent the first portion of the natural gas flowing from Azerbaijan to Europe under this project.

The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline is designed to meet Europe's and Turkey's demand for natural gas, and to diversify natural gas supply paths.

The project's value is 10 billion USD. The capacity of TANAP is 16 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year, and it is planned to enhance the pipeline's capacity in the future, namely to 23 and 31 billion cubic meters by 2023 and 2026, respectively (*ITV, December 1, 2019*).

Additional Information

December 2, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.9695 GEL

1 GBP - 3.8292 GEL

100 RUB -4.6268 GEL


1 EUR - 3.2676 GEL

1 TRY - 0.5162 GEL


100 JPY - 2.7106 GEL


Monday 2 December	Tuesday 3 December	Wednesday 4 December	Thursday 5 December	Friday 6 December
				
-1° 8°	1° 8°	2° 10°	-2° 6°	-1° 5°

 **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](#)**