

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

December 2-4

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Occupied Abkhazia Leader Dismisses Interior Minister, Chief Prosecutor amid Sokhumi Protests

Raul Khajimba, Moscow-backed leader of occupied Abkhazia, who was re-elected in September, dismissed "interior minister" Gari Arshba and "chief prosecutor" Zurab Achba, as well as their first deputies on December 2.

The decision comes after two men, allegedly criminal authorities – Astamur Shamba and Alkhas Avidzba died and three more injured during the incident that took place in one of the restaurants of Sokhumi on November 22.

Khajimba demanded to immediately solve these and other crimes committed in November and detain the perpetrators at the "security council" meeting held on the same day, but his demands yielded no results (*Civil.ge, December 3, 2019*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

2. Occupied Tskhinvali Softens Movement Restrictions for Akhagori Residents

The Moscow-backed leadership of occupied Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia announced on December 2 that residents of Akhagori Municipality, who have neither "South Ossetian nor Russian citizenship" and need medical aid that Tskhinvali cannot provide, will be able to cross the Odzisi-Mosabruni ("Razdakhani" in Ossetian) crossing point and move to Tbilisi-controlled territory for medical treatment.

They will also be provided with "necessary conditions" to receive pensions until they get registered in "the pension fund of South Ossetia."

The decision was made at the today's session of the "security council" chaired by Russia-backed Tskhinvali leader Anatoly Bibilov about three months after the closure of the crossing points connecting the occupied region with Georgia proper, citing tensions coming from Tbilisi (*Civil.ge, December 2, 2019*).

3. Minister of Internal Affairs expects Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili's release

All international organizations are involved in the efforts to release Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili imprisoned by the occupational regime of Tskhinvali region – Minister of Internal Affairs Vakhtang Gomelauri said.

Gomelaury said he presumed that the Georgian doctor would be released after the court decision. "This person is a doctor. He is neither a militant nor former law enforcer. I have the expectation that he will be released. Whatever hot is the war, detention of a doctor is not admissible anywhere in the world," Gomelaury said (*1TV, December 3, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Georgian, French FMs Launch Inaugural 'Amilakhvari Dialogue' in Paris

On November 2, Georgian and French Foreign Ministers, Davit Zalkaliani and Jean-Yves Le Drian, respectively, held the inaugural meeting of "Amilakhvari Dialogue" named after a decorated Georgian officer of the French Foreign Legion who died in combat for France in 1942.

In his opening remarks, FM Zalkaliani noted that Franco-Georgian relations "have transformed in such a manner," throughout the years that it has "moved to a new level," leading to "establishment of a format of strategic dialogue."

"It is without a doubt that this institutionalized platform gives a unique opportunity to the Georgian and French parties to discuss, exchange views on cooperation between Georgia and France, as well as to determine further perspectives [of bilateral cooperation]," Zalkaliani stated (*Civil.ge, November 3, 2019*).

5. Georgian Foreign Minister Addresses 'NATO Engages' Conference in London

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani, who is visiting London on December 3-4, participated in "NATO Engages: Innovating the Alliance" conference held on the sidelines of NATO Leaders Meeting yesterday.

At a discussion on the security situation on NATO's frontlines from the Baltic to the Black Sea, FM Zalkaliani said that "the full integration in NATO" is Georgia's top foreign policy priority.

According to FM Zalkaliani, Georgia is one of the most advanced NATO aspirant countries, and "it's a well recognized fact" that all practical tools that the country has, help speed up "the eventual goal" of Georgia "which is full membership" of the Alliance.

Zalkaliani also noted that Georgia's way to NATO integration "is not directed against third parties," but it's for strengthening the defense capabilities and resilience of the country. "In the Black Sea region, which is becoming more and more important place of attention to NATO, one of the main security challenges comes from Russia," he said (*Civil.ge, December 3, 2019*).

6. Vladimir Putin - NATO's continued expansion posed a threat to Russia

"As we know, the Soviet Union no longer exists. Warsaw Pact does not exist. The military coalition that was created to counterbalance NATO does not exist. However, NATO still exists and it is evolving.

NATO's continued expansion and deployment of its military infrastructure near Russia's borders is one of the potential threats to our country.

Russia will continue to invest money in upgrading military equipment. At the same time, we are ready to work with NATO to tackle the real threats, such as international terrorism, military conflicts and the uncontrolled proliferation of weapons of mass destruction," - Vladimir Putin said (*1TV, December 4, 2019*).

7. Germany Declares two Russian Embassy Employees Non-Gratae for non-Cooperation on Khangoshvili Murder case

The German Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said on 4 December, that the Federal Foreign Office today declared two employees of the Russian Embassy in Berlin to be *personae non-gratae*, reacting to the fact that the Russian authorities, despite repeated high-level and repeated requests, did not sufficiently participate in the investigation of the murder of Tornike (Zelimkhan) Khangoshvili in the Berlin Tiergarten on 23 August.

The official release says "from the point of view of the Federal Government, serious and prompt cooperation by the Russian authorities remains imperative, given that today the Federal Public Prosecutor General has taken over the investigation in this case on the grounds that there are sufficient real indications that the killing was either commissioned by state agencies of the Russian Federation or such agencies of the Autonomous Chechen Republic as part of the Russian Federation." (*Civil.ge, December 3, 2019*).

8. Russia's Foreign Ministry says Germany's expulsion of two Russian diplomats is unfriendly and unfounded

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation commented on Germany's expulsion of two Russian diplomats earlier today.

As local media says, Russia's Foreign Ministry thinks Germany's decision is unfriendly and unfounded. The Kremlin has denied any Russian government involvement in Zelimkhan Khangoshvili's murder case (*ITV, December 4, 2019*).

9. Minister Tsulukiani Addresses ICC Assembly, Unveils Plan to Nominate ICC Judge

Georgian Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani, who is visiting the Hague, addressed the 18th session of the Assembly of States Parties (ASP) to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on December 2. Minister Tsulukiani expressed her hope for impartial investigation into Russo-Georgian War of 2008, as well as unveiled Georgia's plans to nominate ICC judge in 2020.

Tsulukiani said in her address that eleven years after the Russo-Georgian war that "targeted Georgian population in a repeated way of ethnic cleansing and made civilians and military personnel victims of various war crimes," there is "a strong consensus in Georgian society and expectations are very high that tangible progress will be achieved in the ICC investigation of these crimes." (*Civil.ge, December 4, 2019*)

❖ Internal Affairs

10. Transparency Intl 'Deeply Concerned' by Political Crisis, Backlash against CSOs in Georgia

Transparency International, a Berlin-based global civil society organisation on fight against corruption, is "deeply concerned by the political crisis and backlash against independent civil society groups in Georgia, which risk harming democratic progress in the country and undermining attempts to fight corruption."

In a statement released on November 30, the organization called on the Georgian government “to respect citizens’ right to peaceful assembly and to find a constructive way to reengage with civil society.” (*Civil.ge*, December 2, 2019).

11. Akaki Zoidze of Parliamentary Majority Renounces MP Mandate

Akaki Zoidze, member of the parliamentary majority and chairman of the Georgian Parliament’s Healthcare and Social Issues Committee, announced on December 2 about his plans to renounce his MP mandate.

Zoidze wrote on his Facebook page that he realizes his own responsibility in “the sharp polarization” of political processes, because despite “certain risks,” it became impossible to convince the teammates of the need to transit to fully proportional electoral system, as well as of holding a referendum or a plebiscite on the issue.

“For me, politics had always been the means for achieving a goal, doing good deeds for the country and our citizens; however, it is unlikely to implement positive reforms amid negative political agenda. Thus, I cannot see my place in the present public [policy and], partisan politics and accordingly, in the Parliament,” Zoidze noted (*Civil.ge*, December 2, 2019).

12. Georgian Dream Supporters Hit the Streets, Countering Tbilisi Protests

As protests calling for proportional elections in 2020 continue throughout Georgia, the supporters of the ruling Georgian Dream party (GDDG) started to regularly mobilize in protest hot-spots to counter the opposition, often using both, verbal and physical abuse in recent days.

Mtskheta incident

On December 2, a group of civil rights and opposition activists of the group “Gabede” (“Dare” – in Georgian) rallied in Mtskheta outside the offices of Georgian Dream’s Dimitri Khundadze, majoritarian MP, who was among the group of deputies that voted against the proportional polls.

The protesters were confronted by the ruling party activists, some of whom were identified as civil servants, who did not allow them to hold a protest rally and assaulted them physically. Two civil rights activists were beaten and hospitalized with injuries. Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri said that seven people were detained during the Mtskheta incident, including three supporters of the ruling party, but all of them were soon released.

Tbilisi follow-up

Another clash of GDDG activists with protesters took place outside the central office of the ruling party on December 2, where civic activists gathered to protest the violence in Mtskheta earlier during the same day. The protesters said once again that they were victims of unprovoked assault by Georgian Dream supporters, as the police stood by.

Civic activists from “In the Service of the Country” group launched the rally outside the ruling party’s office at 19:00. Georgian Dream supporters showed up shortly afterwards soon and started to insult the protesters both verbally and physically.

Gathered GDDG were aggressive against the protesters, saying they were holdovers of ex-President Saakashvili’s supporters and his United National Movement (UNM). Their posters claimed they were indignant at UNM party “coming back to power”.

13. Political assessments of Georgian Dream activist's action

The opposition claims the ruling party resorted to counter rallies failing to curtail the protests through the repeat police action, and as the use of force against apparently non-violent protesters starts to affect its standing with international partners. The opposition says encouraging civic confrontation in the country is dangerous and says the ruling party is responsible.

MP Elene Khoshtaria of European Georgia noted that Ivanishvili is trying to disrupt protests and trigger confrontation. "We will not get involved in either confrontation or violence. Bidzina Ivanishvili will not be able to disrupt protests," she said.

"Ivanishvili imitates civil confrontation... now it is clear for everyone that he wants unrest and destabilization, but we should not allow him to achieve it," Mikheil Saakashvili, ex-President and leader of the UNM said.

The ruling party officials say it is the opposition which provokes confrontation, while the state acts to "prevent" potential violence. **Georgian Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze** said that "the state should take preventive measures and prevent actions from the both sides, which may cause violence."

Kakha Kaladze, the ruling party's Secretary General and Tbilisi Mayor, also accused the opposition of being behind the unrest. He, however, noted that he sees no threat of civil confrontation.

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said that "the state will not allow any civic confrontation." "Unfortunately, irresponsible people are trying to drag the youth into this political and emotionally tense process. Do not forget that these young people may oppose each other today, but tomorrow these people should build the country; so, besides law, moral responsibility will be imposed on all those people, who dare, who call or incite this confrontation," he said.

Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria spoke for calm pointing to the importance of reaching a political consensus. "If the current situation state of affairs persists, it will have a [damaging] effect on the country and the people, because actually all government agencies are engaged in preventing such incidents and nobody has time to think about long-term reforms," she said (*Civil.ge, December 3, 2019*).

14. Adjara Public TV Staff Accuses New Director of "Blackmail, Surveillance"

The employees of Adjara TV and Radio company, a publicly-funded broadcaster based in Batumi, held a protest rally today against Giorgi Kokhreidze, who was elected as the new director of the broadcaster on November 22.

Journalists accused the new director of "blackmail" and "surveillance" and demanded from him to stop "attacking and discrediting employees" as well as raising "unjustified accusations" against them.

According to journalists, following the impeachment of Natia Kapanadze, former director, about seven months ago, it was critical for the employees to ensure that the editorial policy remained independent from governmental influence (*Civil.ge, December 4, 2019*).

15. Kakha Kaladze - I can brag, Tbilisi will have one of the best public transports in Europe

"We promised society that public transport in Tbilisi would be well-ordered. I can brag that when we finish reform, Tbilisi will have one of the best public transports in Europe. Similarly, minibuses need to be replaced.

Furthermore, our society is aware of the success of ongoing taxi reform and well-ordered underground that carries most of the passengers,” - Kakha Kaladze said (*1TV, December 4, 2019*).

16. Opposition registers new bill regarding change of electoral system

Representatives of the opposition explain that the draft law, developed by 30 opposition forces, implies holding of the 2020 parliamentary elections through a mixed electoral system.

Sergi Kapanadze, a member of European Georgia party, said the draft law also implies proportional distribution of votes and multi-mandate majoritarian (single mandate) constituencies.

“The opposition parties have submitted a draft law to the Parliament, which implies the so-called German model. This is a project aiming at reforming the electoral system. It involves the German principle, which means that all parties will get seats in the parliament according to the proportional vote results and it also involves multi-mandate majoritarian constituencies.

The bill was initiated by the National Movement and European Georgia parliamentary factions, it is developed by 30 political subjects and their representation. So there is complete consensus on the opposition wing. Now the ball is on the Georgian Dream’s pitch and if they want to find a way out of this very acute political crisis, here is the solution,” Kapanadze said (*1TV, December 4, 2019*).

17. PM meeting with representatives of healthcare sphere

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia is meeting with representatives of medical clinics at the Governmental Administration.

The meeting is closed for the media. Representatives of the healthcare sphere told journalists before the meeting that regulations, activated starting November 21 about tariffs for medical services set to the clinics involved in state medical insurance program, would be the main topic for discussions.

Heads of the clinics demand that the regulations are postponed for at least 6 months. They claim that the new regulations caused problems both for clinics and patients and that carrying out of planned surgeries is currently suspended.

Aleksandre Aladashvili, President of the Georgian Society of Cardiologists said that the normal work is impossible with the tariffs proposed by Health Ministry.

Ekaterine Tikaradze, Georgian Minister of Labor, Health and Social Affairs is also attending the meeting, which was organized at the initiative of Prime Minister (*1TV, December 4, 2019*).

18. PM pledges to change principles of healthcare reform

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia met with heads of about 30 medical clinics at the Governmental Administration earlier today. Ekaterine Tikaradze, Georgian Minister of IDPs, Labor, Health and Social Affairs also attended the meeting, which was organized at PM’s initiative.

Head of the government said that the healthcare reform was considered to be one of the most successful ones carried out in 2019. Therefore, as PM noted, retention of reform’s successful outcomes, its reputation and further development was in the interests of everybody.

According to Gakharia, the government was ready to discuss any problems facing the healthcare sphere but functioning of the reform and its development was essential. “Effectiveness of the public insurance system is vitally important. . . . The system changes, first of all, have to increase effectiveness and quality of

service. If we face certain problems, I believe we will manage to reach an agreement," Gakharia said (ITV, December 4, 2019).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

19. Geostat: Annual Inflation 7% in November

Georgia's annual inflation stood at 7% in November after it was registered at 6.9% in the previous month, the National Statistics Office (Geostat) reported on December 3. On a monthly basis prices were up by 0.9% in November.

The annual inflation rate was driven by higher prices in the group of food and non-alcoholic beverages (up by 13.4% y/y); alcoholic beverages and tobacco (up by 15.4% y/y); recreation and culture (up by 7% y/y); transport (up by 3.1% y/y); restaurants and hotels (up by 7.4% y/y) (Civil.ge, December 3, 2019).

Additional Information

December 5, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.9573 GEL	1 GBP - 3.8572 GEL	100 RUB -4.1854 GEL
1 EUR - 3.2746 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5150 GEL	100 JPY - 2.6197 GEL

Thursday 5 December	Friday 6 December	Saturday 7 December	Sunday 8 December	Monday 9 December
				
0° 7°	-1° 6°	0° 7°	1° 9°	1° 10°

-  **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](#)**