

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

December 5-8

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### **1. Georgia FM to OSCE Ministerial: Situation in Abkhazia, Tskhinvali 'Dramatically Worsening'**

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani addressed the 26th OSCE Ministerial Council in Bratislava, Slovakia on December 5.

In his remarks, Zalkaliani noted that existing conflicts in the OSCE member states, including Georgia, should be resolved in full compliance with the principles of international law, particularly the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Zalkaliani said that Georgia has been dealing with consequences of Russia's "full-scale military aggression" for eleven years now, and that "the state of security and human rights" in occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, "is dramatically worsening." (*Civil.ge, December 6, 2019*)

#### **2. OSCE Group of Friends Concerned by 'Intensified Provocations' by Russia, Sokhumi, Tskhinvali**

The OSCE Group of Friends of Georgia, which includes Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, released a joint statement on December 5, reaffirming their "full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders," and calling on Russia "to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence" of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

"Eleven years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia, we remain deeply concerned over the continued occupation of the territory of Georgia," the group said, denouncing "intensified provocations by Russia and the regimes in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, including the attempted expansion of the occupied area and the building of 'posts' by the so-called security forces of South Ossetia region close to Chorchana village on territory controlled by the Georgian Government." (*Civil.ge, December 8, 2019*)

#### **3. New Head of Gali District Appointed**

Raul Khajimba, Moscow-backed leader of occupied Abkhazia, accepted the resignation filed by Temur Nadaraia, acting head of Abkhaz administration of Gali District and appointed Omar Bganba as the new head.

Nadaraia, who fought against Georgia's central government during the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia, served as the head of the Gali district administration since November 2014.

Newly appointed head of the Gali district, Omar Bganba, 50, served as the head of Gulripshi district in 2016-2019. Earlier he was involved in commercial activities (*Civil.ge, December 7, 2019*).

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

##### **4. Russia-backed Tskhinvali Authorities Adopt 2020 Budget**

On December 4, occupied Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia's 'legislature' adopted "the 2020 state budget," that sets the overall budgetary revenues at RUB 7.58 billion (USD 118 million), of which RUB 6.22 billion (USD 97 million) or 82 percent of the total revenues, is to be funded by the Russian Federation.

RUB 4.72 billion (USD 73.5 million) of Moscow's funding will be spent "on social-economic development," while the remaining RUB 1.5 billion (USD 23.4 million) on "the investment program." The region's own income is projected to constitute RUB 1.5 billion (USD 23.4 million) in 2020 (*Civil.ge, December 5, 2019*).

##### **5. Carl Hartzell – EU is actively involved in release of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili**

The European Union is actively involved in the release of the illegally detained Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili through different activities and actors – said Carl Hartzell, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia.

According to the EU Ambassador to Georgia, the European Union will continue making pressure. "Unfortunately, the case is special and has to do with the tense situation, the circumstance, which we have been witnessing for the last several months. We should continue making efforts to resolve it since the case significantly affects humanitarian issues and human rights negatively," Hartzell said (*1TV, December 5, 2019*).

##### **6. PM - I hope we will congratulate each other on ending Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili's difficult story in the near future**

I hope we will congratulate each other on ending this difficult story in the near future, – Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia told reporters about Vazha Gaprindashvili, Georgian doctor illegally detained by the occupation forces.

According to PM, the government works in full coordination with all international partners to resolve the problem.

"With respect to Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili and this grave problem, I want to tell you that all relevant government agencies are in full coordination with all our international partners. I hope we will all congratulate each other on ending this difficult story in the near future," Gakharia said (*1TV, December 7, 2019*).

##### **7. Nino Burjanadze raised issue of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili's release in Moscow**

Nino Burjanadze, Leader of Democratic Movement – United Georgia Party said that she had an important visit to Moscow.

Burjanadze told journalists at Tbilisi International Airport that she had raised the issue of the release of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili, illegally detained by occupational forces.

Burjanadze said that the release of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili was one of the painful issues for the Georgian people.

"I saw serious human compassion during all the meetings regarding the issue. Russian politicians could understand both human and political importance of the case. My request to the Russian authorities was to make maximal efforts for the release of Vazha Gaprindashvili so that he could return to his family as soon as possible," Burjanadze said (*1TV, December 7, 2019*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### **8. Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine Unveil "Ambitious Agenda" for Further Integration into EU**

During the meeting between Eastern Partnership Countries' Foreign Ministers and Josep Borrell Fontelles, the new High Representative and Vice President of European Union, on the sidelines of 26th Ministerial Council of OSCE in Bratislava today, the Foreign Ministers of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine introduced the joint statement to EU's top diplomat, unveiling three nations' ambitions for further integration into the European Union.

Davit Zalkaliani, Aureliu Ciocoi and Vadym Prystaiko, Foreign Ministers of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, respectively, have issued a joint statement on December 5, that declares "gradual integration aimed at achieving full access to the EU single market", as well as other European benchmarks as the "ambitious target" for three EU Associated Eastern Partners (EaP).

The three Foreign Ministers declared that "new horizons should be opened in implementing the four freedoms [EU's four freedoms of movement of goods, capital, services and persons] between EU and three Associated Partners, which will also lay ground to the creation of a common economic space." (*Civil.ge, December 5, 2019*).

### **9. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Supports NDI, IRI's Work in Georgia**

Representative Eliot L. Engel, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, today issued the statement in support of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), U.S. founded organizations that faced strong criticism from Georgia's ruling party chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili recently.

Congressman Engel stressed that both, NDI and IRI work with all political parties in Georgia without taking sides in Georgian politics. "In Georgia they work closely with partners across the political spectrum, including the ruling Georgian Dream party and opposition parties. They do not choose sides or support particular political outcomes," Engel stated (*Civil.ge, December 6, 2019*).

### **10. Archbishop Melkisedek: I support the autocephaly for Ukrainian Church**

"All you know my position, I support the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church", – Archbishop Melkisedek said.

As for the meeting of the Holy Synod, as the Archbishop says, the exact date of the Synod's meeting is unknown. According to him, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II will make a decision in that regard (*1TV, December 8, 2019*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### **11. Elizabeth Rood -- US is concerned about increased political tension in Georgia**

The US is concerned about the increased political tension in Georgia and supports holding of a dialogue between the ruling and opposition parties, – US chargé d'affaires Elizabeth Rood told reporters when commenting about the ongoing developments in Georgia.

According to Acting US Ambassador, they fully support freedom of expression and speech within the framework of the constitution. "We also hope that the police will respond equally to all this," Elizabeth Rood said (*ITV, December 5, 2019*).

### **12. Protest Rally in Kutaisi**

Oppositional forces have organized protest rally in Kutaisi with the demand: "if government does not change the election system, we will start common national resistance."

Number of participants of the demonstration around 3-4 thousand according to the opposition, while Georgian Dream supporters are saying that there are no more than 3-4 hundred people and they have gathered in front of the city hall of Kutaisi. Leaders of opposition do not explain what does common national resistance means, but they confirm that protest rallies in the regions will continue.

Leader of the United National Movement Grigol Vashadze said: "we have prepared tickets for Georgian Dream and they will fly from Georgia through Kutaisi International Airport".

One more member of the UNM, MP Roman Gotsiridze said that they are not planning to forgive the lie to Ivanishvili and the protest will continue in different forms. "Demonstrations in the street will continue but there will be surprises as well," – added Gotsiridze.

Supporters of Georgian dream have thrown eggs to the demonstrators from the roof of the one of the nearby building, claiming that only 20-30 participants of the rally are locals from Kutaisi, while the rest are transported from the different regions. In response, opposition started singing the national anthem of Georgia. As Gigi Ugulava explained this is the difference between the civilized protest and aggressive actions from Georgian Dream supporters.

One more incident had been registered during the demonstration, group of young men have approached to the rally participants and verbally abused them. This action caused physical confrontation between two sides (*IPN.GE, 1TV, TV Pirveli, KutaisiPost.ge, December 6, 2019*).

### **13. Roman Kakulia on meeting between ruling team and opposition**

It is clear that dialogue to a certain extent means a readiness to concede, – Roman Kakulia, a member of the parliamentary majority, said when commenting about a meeting between the opposition and the authorities on the electoral system, which will be held today.

"In general, when there is a desire for dialogue, it is clear that dialogue to a certain extent means a readiness to concede. Otherwise, this is no longer a dialogue. When there is a willingness to dialogue, both sides should find resources for concessions. Otherwise, negotiations usually end to no avail. I hope that both sides will be guided by this principle," - Kakulia said (*1TV, December 8, 2019*).

#### **14. Carl Hartzell: Dialogue between authorities and opposition has great support to make progress for the next election**

I hope that this meeting will be useful and the discussion will bring more clarity to the process as to what options may emerge, – Carl Hartzell, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia told reporters ahead of a meeting between government officials and opposition over the electoral system in Georgia. The ambassador said the dialogue has great support for moving the process forward for the next elections.

“Now I can’t say how far or how fast we can move forward. I’m glad that we have the opportunity to hold this meeting. I hope that this meeting will be useful and the discussion will bring more clarity to the process as to what options may emerge. After the dialogue, we find out what results we can achieve, but the dialogue is extremely important” – Carl Hartzell stated (*1TV, December 8, 2019*).

#### **15. Archil Talakvadze: We are returning to normal political process gradually**

“Today the second meeting of political dialogue will be held with participation international partners, ambassadors. We are returning to the normal political process gradually. Today we will have a discussion on what we can do together under the existing mixed model.

The resource, which will bring more confidence to the 2020 elections, be acceptable to the opposition and society, still exists

According to the current mixed model, half of the parliamentary mandates are staffed proportionally, and the other half according to majority rules, we will have a discussion over this second half. Today we are ready to listen to the proposals of the opposition. We will have our own arguments and we will take the time, if there are concrete proposals, for preparation. It is important for us to return to a normal political process, of course, the dialogue is good. As chairman of the parliament, I welcome the negotiation between our party and the opposition, this format, in which the parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition is represented” – Archil Talakvadze stated (*1TV, December 8, 2019*).

#### **16. Opposition leaders meet MEPs**

Part of the leaders of opposition parties is holding a meeting with MEPs. Members of the European Parliament, who are in Georgia within the framework of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, meet with leaders of the United National Movement, European Georgia and New Georgia.

As one of the leaders of the United National Movement, Grigol Vashadze stated before the meeting, the main topic of discussion will be electoral legislation, corruption, nepotism and the list of persons which according to Vashadze are detained on the political ground after June 20 (*1TV, December 8, 2019*).

#### **17. Eleven people imposed imprisonment for production of juveniles’ pornographic material**

The case was discussed at Tbilisi City Court this afternoon and Judge Ekaterine Kukulashvili made the decision. The judge did not satisfy the motion of the defense side asking for imposition of a bail.

Prosecutor Mariam Gogoreliani claimed that there were pieces of evidence confirming that all the detainees knew about what kind of photo session their children had participated in return to money.

A total of 21 people are charged into the case of production of pornographic material of juveniles. Ten people out of the detained ones are parents (*1TV, December 7, 2019*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

### 18. Minister of Regional Development calls on founders of Anaklia Development Consortium to admit that they are not able to implement Anaklia project

Maia Tskitishvili, Georgian Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure called on founders of Anaklia Development Consortium to admit that they are not able to implement Anaklia deepwater port project. Tskitishvili said that taking into consideration that the country needed a deepwater port, the project had to begin functioning as soon as possible.

According to Tskitishvili, it is regrettable that Anaklia Development Consortium has faced problems in the attraction of finances for the last 2 years.

In response to the question whether Anaklia Development Consortium would be able to present an investor before December 31, Tskitishvili said: "The issue does not have to do with the attraction of a new investor. This is about the total credit taken in the amount of USD 600 million to launch the project. Unfortunately, the Consortium has no resource to begin implementation of the project," the Minister said and added that making a prompt decision was needed (*1TV, December 5, 2019*).

### Additional Information

**December 9, 2019**  
**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

|                    |                    |                      |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 USD - 2.9466 GEL | 1 GBP - 3.8683 GEL | 100 RUB -4.6218 GEL  |
| 1 EUR - 3.2690 GEL | 1 TRY - 0.5113 GEL | 100 JPY - 2.7138 GEL |

| Monday<br>9 December  | Tuesday<br>10 December  | Wednesday<br>11 December  | Thursday<br>12 December  | Friday<br>13 December   |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| -1° 10°   | -1° 8°  | 0° 10°  | -1° 9°   | 1° 8°   |

-  **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](#)**