

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

December 12-15

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Date: **December 16, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region (*so called South Ossetia*)

1. Vazha Gaprindashvili remains in illegal custody

Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili remains in illegal custody. As Ekho Kavkaza reports the lawyer announced the decision made by Occupied Akhalgori court today. Tbilisi-based doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili was illegally detained by Russian occupation forces near the occupation line with Akhalgori Municipality on November 9. He was sent to a two-month pretrial detention on November 15.

Vazha Gaprindashvili was charged with “illegally crossing the border” under article 322 of the criminal code of Russia. Tbilisi activated the hotline mechanism of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to Georgia (*ITV, December 13, 2019*).

2. Vazha Gaprindashvili's daughter - Vazha Gaprindashvili pleads not guilty because of which he stays in custody

‘Day 35! It is very unfortunate that despite the bulk of local and international involvements and promises, we have not seen the decision we wanted.

The trial was postponed for a week. The main reason for the cancellation is that Vazha Gaprindashvili denies the allegations and pleads not guilty,’ Irina Gaprindashvili notes (*ITV, December 13, 2019*).

3. President of Georgia appeals to the international community to increase efforts for Vazha Gaprindashvili

‘Despite all the efforts and active involvement of the international community, the illegally detained doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili remains in custody, which aggravates the existing difficult situation.

Once again I appeal to the international community to increase efforts to immediately release the doctor,’ the Georgian President’s statement reads (*ITV, December 13, 2019*).

4. Family of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili demands establishment of Coordination Council and meeting with PM

Family members of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili, who remains arrested by the occupational regime, demands establishment of a Coordination Council and a meeting with Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia.

Vazha Gaprindashvili’s wife Tamila Lapanashvili said that the engagement of the government and efforts of the international organizations gave no results.

A protest will be held at Republican Square in Tbilisi on December 15 and then at the occupational line regarding the illegally arrested doctor's case. "This will be an activity of the medical society, of all those regardless party, religious or ethnic background, to whom the captivity of a patriot person matters," Lapanashvili said (1TV, December 13, 2019).

5. Chairman of Georgian Lawyers' Association keeps hope that Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili will be released on December 20

Davit Asatiani, Chairman of Georgian Lawyers' Association said he kept hope that Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili, kept imprisoned by the occupational regime, would be released during the next court trial scheduled for December 20.

"It is regrettable that nobody has common sense that the doctor who is arrested for his humanitarian activities and does not plead guilty has remained in the illegal imprisonment for more than 1 month," Asatiani said.

The court trial into the case of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili was held on December 13. According to the decision of the court, Gaprindashvili was left in imprisonment.

Tbilisi-based doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili was illegally detained by Russian occupation forces near the occupation line with Akhagori Municipality on November 9. He was sent to two-month pretrial detention on November 15.

Vazha Gaprindashvili was charged with "illegally crossing the border" under article 322 of the criminal code of Russia (1TV, December 14, 2019).

6. In support of Vazha Gaprindashvili, protesters released balloons and a white coat in the air



In support of Vazha Gaprindashvili, a protest rally is being held at the occupation line, near the village of Odzisi. The protesters demand to release illegally detained doctor immediately. Symbolically, the protesters released balloons and a white coat in the air.

The wife of the doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili has read a brief statement stressing that the doctors have no boundaries either at war or at peace. Tamila Lapanashvili addressed Ossetian doctors as well.

'Ossetian doctors, let us take care of our patients together and give this opportunity to Vazha Gaprindashvili too,' Tamila Lapanashvili said.

Family members, citizens, doctor's colleagues' as well as the representatives of political parties are present at the scene (1TV, December 15, 2019).

❖ Foreign Affairs

7. Five Georgians arrested in Dublin and Barcelona

Law enforcers from Georgia, Ireland and Spain, through intensive cooperation and jointly conducted special operation, detained 5 Georgian citizens, members of a crime gang, on December 9.

According to the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the detainees are charged for producing fake documents and contribution to illegal migration.

The investigation determined that the charged persons sent parcels across the territory of Spain containing falsified ID documents that were used by Georgian citizens in Ireland and other European countries afterwards.

The crime envisages up to 8 years in prison according to the Spanish legislation. Fake documents have been confiscated upon the search of the detainees' temporary living places as pieces of evidence (*Civil.ge, December 13, 2019*).

8. MFA - Otar Vardidze kidnapped by pirates has been released

'With the efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the Embassy of Georgia to the Republic of Greece, Georgian sailor Otar Vardidze, who was kidnapped by pirates from Greek-flagged tanker in Africa's Port of Lome, Togo Terminal on November 4 has been released. During this period, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia worked coordinately in all areas.

We had constant communication with Georgian sailor's family,' spokesperson for the MFA of Georgia Vladimir Constantinidi stated (*1TV, December 15, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

9. Committee Endorses Judges, as the Police Detain 16 Protesters Outside

The Parliamentary Committee on Legal Issues has endorsed 14 out of 20 candidates for the Supreme Court. The candidates will likely be voted into the bench at the Plenary Session later today.

At today's stormy session the opposition and independent lawmakers – some of whom, like MP Eka Beselia quit the ruling party in protest over the decision to nominate these candidates – demanded vocally from the ruling party MPs to vote down the list.

The same sentiment was voiced by the protesters outside the parliament building, 16 of whom were detained by the police for "hooliganism" and "disobedience". According to media reports, opposition politicians Giorgi Vashadze of "New Georgia" as well as Irakli Kupradze and Giorgi Bunturi of "Lelo" were among the detained (*Civil.ge, December 12, 2019*).

10. Stink Disrupts Parliament Session

Protest movement "For Freedom" which runs #Shame (#სირცხვილია) campaign, at the forefront of Tbilisi Protests, said in a Facebook post they smuggled a veterinary antiseptic liquid with strong smell (ASD-2F) to disrupt the parliament plenary which is to endorse the controversial Supreme Court nominees.

The session was cut short after MPs complained of strong revolting smell, some were reported as feeling faint and were treated by medics. The Parliament called in the police and forensics.

According to the Police statement, an investigation was launched under the article 117 of the Criminal Code "an attempt at grave injury to health" which carries a maximum sentence of 3 to 6 years imprisonment.

Speaking to the journalists, Speaker Archil Talakvadze said “It is regrettable, that after violent attack [on the Parliament] that we saw in June, and that received response from the state, today we saw what is probably a chemical attack on the parliament.” He said it was done by “UNM (United National Movement)-affiliated group” (*Civil.ge, December 12, 2019*).

11. Parliament Puts 14 Judges on the Top Bench for Lifetime Tenure

On December 12, the plenary session of the Parliament of Georgia has confirmed 14 judges out of 20 candidates for the lifetime tenure at the Supreme Court.

The judges were supported by the parliamentary majority as the opposition parties, including the United National Movement (UNM), European Georgia and former ruling party lawmakers, refused to participate in voting.

The new Supreme Court judges are:

- Merab Gabinashvili;
- Miranda Eremadze;
- Mamuka Vasadze (First Deputy Prosecutor General);
- Maia Vachadze;
- Tamar Zambakhidze;
- Shalva Tadumadze (Acting Prosecutor General);
- Vladimer Kakabadze;
- Levan Mikaberidze;
- Giorgi Mikautadze (Secretary of the High Council of Justice);
- Nugzar Skhirtladze;
- Lali Papiashvili;
- Nino Kadagidze;
- Ketevan Tsintsadze;
- Alexander Tsuladze (*Civil.ge, December 12, 2019*).

12. U.S. Embassy on Lifetime Appointment of Supreme Court Judges

The U.S. Embassy to Tbilisi reacted critically to the Parliament’s vote concerning the lifetime appointment of Supreme Court judges.

An official release lists cases where the Embassy and other international partners have voiced concerns regarding the process of appointments.

“In May we expressed disappointment at Parliament’s adoption of selection procedures that failed to incorporate many of the recommendations of the Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR, and the U.S., EU, and Council of Europe missions in Tbilisi,” the U.S. Embassy stated.

Subsequently, the Embassy said, the candidate selection process in the High Council of Justice (HCoJ) “lacked transparency and resulted in a slate of nominees that did not fully represent the best qualified candidates.”

Welcoming the open hearings at the Parliament’s Legal Issues Committee, the release said “a number of candidates were unable to demonstrate sufficiently their legal expertise or a commitment to impartiality.”

"We regret the list of candidates approved in Parliament today includes such nominees," it notes (*Civil.ge, December 13, 2019*).

13. Justice Minister – Statement of US Embassy signals that we should continue working on perfection of court system

The statement of the US Embassy in Georgia released in connection with the approval of Supreme Court judges by the Parliament signals that we should continue working on the perfection of the court system – Tea Tsulukiani, Justice Minister said.

According to Tsulukiani, the statement made earlier by the US Embassy said that the rule introduced regarding the selection of judges for Supreme Court was a step forward, while the statement made by the Embassy on December 12 indicated that the present-day system was better than the previous one though its further perfection was possible.

As for the approved judges, the parliament voted for the candidates through secret balloting, freely and without any pressure. "No comment can be made on part of the executive authorities because the parliament voted for the candidates' names," Tsulukiani said (*1TV, December 13, 2019*).

14. PACE Rapporteurs 'Deplore' Appointment of 14 Judges

The co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the monitoring of Georgia, Titus Corlăţean (Romania, SOC) and Claude Kern (France, ALDE), released a statement on December 13, saying the decision of the Georgian Parliament to appoint 14 judges to the Supreme Court, "against the recommendation of the international community, including the Assembly," "can only be deplored."

The statement reads that during their visit to Georgia in September, the Co-rapporteurs communicated their "serious concerns" about "opaque and deficient" selection process of the candidates, and expressed their expectation that "the parliament would rectify the shortcomings in the selection process, including by appointing only the minimum number of judges needed to ensure the proper functioning of the Supreme Court." (*1TV, December 14, 2019*)

15. Thea Tsulukiani - The Parliament elected the judges of the Supreme Court and Europeans are obliged to respect the decision

'We are an independent, sovereign state; We have adopted a law. Even some Western countries do not have as transparent rules for the election of the judges as Georgia has.

Therefore, I would advise them to share our laws. As for specific names, the Parliament of Georgia has chosen these people, and all Europeans are obliged to respect the decision,' Tsulukiani stated (*1TV, December 14, 2019*).

16. Parliament Terminates UNM MP Nika Melia's Mandate

With 88 votes in favor and zero against, the parliamentary majority terminated MP mandate of Nika Melia, member of the opposition United National Movement (UNM) on December 12. Opposition and independent lawmakers boycotted the vote.

This follows the decision of Tbilisi City Court on December 2, which found Melia guilty of abuse of office in forcing the Cartu Bank – of the current leader of the Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili – into bankruptcy in 2013. Melia served as the head of the National Bureau of Enforcement of Sanctions at the time. Speaking to Mtavari Arkhi TV, Melia said “there was nothing unexpected” in the decision, which he considers a consistent effort on behalf of the ruling party to put him behind the bars (*Civil.ge, December 12, 2019*).

17. Leader of Parliamentary Majority makes statement about possible Constitutional changes

The ruling team is considering making changes in Constitution before 2020 parliamentary elections based on which any snap polls till 2024 in Georgia will be held with the mixed election system.

Mamuka Mdinaradze, Leader of the Parliamentary Majority said during a press conference that Majoritarian (single mandate) MPs would withdraw their initiative regarding holding of elections in 2024 through Majoritarian rule.

“Under these conditions, the duties of the elected parliament will continue till 2024. Also, in this case, Majoritarian MPs will reject their initiative,” Mdinaradze said.

He added that otherwise Majoritarian lawmakers would continue pushing the process with the urge to hold a referendum at one time with the 2020 parliamentary elections regarding transformation onto Majoritarian system of elections fully (*1TV, December 13, 2019*).

18. Health condition of teenager, injured when attempting to commit suicide, remains critical

The health condition of a 15-year-old juvenile, who was injured when attempting to commit suicide, remains critical.

Giorgi Kikava, Doctor of Iashvili Children’s Clinic told Georgian First Channel that the patient is attached to the artificial breathing device and the future reaction will be planned at the decision of Neurologists.

The teenager jumped from the 9th floor of a block of apartments in Dighomi district of Tbilisi on December 12. The incident was preceded by a conflict at Green School. The juvenile was questioned by the police.

The lawyer claims that his defendant was subjected to psychological pressure during questioning. He said that law enforcers were forcing the teenager to admit to have committed hooliganism. An investigation into the case is ongoing (*1TV, December 14, 2019*).

19. Georgian Dream held activity “Georgia’s Way to Europe” at Freedom Square

The ruling Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia Party is holding an activity “Georgia’s Way to Europe” at Freedom Square in Tbilisi. The youth organization of Georgian Dream is the initiator of the activity dedicated to Georgia’s Chairmanship of the Council of Europe (CoE). Giorgi Chakvetadze, Chairman of Youth Organization of Georgian Dream addressed the gathered crowd.

According to Kakha Kaladze, Secretary-General of Georgian Dream and Tbilisi Mayor, this is a solemn day for every person to whom Georgia’s European future is valuable and important.

Supporters of Georgian Dream arrived from all regions of Georgia. The party provides their transportation. Traffic movement is restricted in some districts of Tbilisi on the occasion of the ongoing event (*1TV, December 14, 2019*).

20. Georgian PM – Our Europeanness is our past, our present, and our future

Europe is the past, present-day and future of Georgia – Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said during the speech delivered at the activity “Georgia’s Way to Europe” organized at Freedom Square in Tbilisi by the Youth Organization of the ruling Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia Party and dedicated to Georgia’s Chairmanship of the Council of Europe (CoE) (*1TV, December 14, 2019*).

21. Bidzina Ivanishvili spoke about Georgia’s European choice at Freedom Square

Bidzina Ivanishvili, Chairman of Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia Party delivered a speech at the activity “Georgia’s Way to Europe” organized at Freedom Square in Tbilisi by the Youth Organization of the ruling Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia Party and dedicated to Georgia’s Chairmanship of the Council of Europe (CoE).

As Ivanishvili said, Georgia has always been a part of Europe and faithfulness to the European choice united Georgian citizens today (*1TV, December 14, 2019*).

22. Georgian Justice Minister - The sides could not reach an agreement on a multi-mandate election system

Georgian Justice Minister Thea Tsulukiani said the sides could not reach an agreement on a multi-mandate election system.

The third meeting between the representatives of the government of Georgia and the opposition parties has ended with no effect.

As Thea Tsulukiani said after the meeting, the sides discussed only the multi-mandate election system which is adapted in a handful of countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

Georgian Justice Minister added that the multi-mandate election system in Georgia which is European country can not be adopted (*1TV, December 15, 2019*).

23. Giga Bokeria - The ruling party asked for additional time to state viewpoint on German model

‘We want to relieve the tension happening now. Due to that, the ruling party should put back their insult to society, they should compromise and stop political persecution and violence. If they do not do so, the drastic processes will not stop in the country.

It is better for them to choose a less harmful way for our country. If they choose the worse way and continue to fluctuate the country, we are ready for it, though it is not our goal,’ Giga Bokeria said (*1TV, December 15, 2019*).

24. Carl Hartzell - The discussion was not easy, but I see the sides have a responsible approach to the dialogue

‘I am happy that I see a responsible approach to the dialogue from both sides, as we already had third meeting.

It is absolutely clear to me that dialogue provides the best opportunity to create a platform to reduce tension and polarization.

I’ll lie if I say the talk was easy. These are fundamental issues. There is a continuing commitment to move forward,’ Carl Hartsell stressed (*1TV, December 15, 2019*).

Additional Information

December 16, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.8647 GEL

1 GBP - 3.8341 GEL

100 RUB -4.6032 GEL


1 EUR - 3.2024 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4951 GEL

100 JPY - 2.6116 GEL


Monday 16 December	Tuesday 17 December	Wednesday 18 December	Thursday 19 December	Friday 20 December
				
2° 13°	1° 11°	3° 12°	4° 14°	3° 14°

 **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](#)**