

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

December 16-17

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. New Interior Minister, Chief Prosecutor Appointed in Occupied Abkhazia

Raul Khajimba, the Moscow-backed leader of Abkhazia, presented Adgur Agrba, occupied region's new 'prosecutor general' to the employees of the "prosecutor's office" of the occupied region today. Agrba, 38, nominated for the position by Khajimba, was endorsed by the "parliament" of the occupied region on December 12.

A week before, Moscow-backed Abkhaz leader also appointed Raul Smir, 66, as the new "interior minister" of occupied Abkhazia.

Raul Khajimba, Abkhaz leader, dismissed "interior minister" Gari Arshba and "chief prosecutor" Zurab Achba, as well as their first deputies on December 2.

The decision came 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 (*Civil.ge, December 16, 2019*).

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

#### 2. Russian occupation forces illegally detained 96-year-old man

Gora Gharibashvili, a 96-year-old resident of the village of Kvemo Chala in Kaspi municipality, was detained by Russian-controlled occupation forces earlier today.

As the representative of Kaspi Municipality City Hall told Georgian First Channel, Gora Gharibashvili was trying to reach a cemetery near the village of Tsunevi, close to the occupation line.

Gora Gharibashvili has been illegally detained for 'crossing the border' by Russian-controlled occupation forces several times over the past years. The previous illegal detention took place last year (*1TV, December 16, 2019*).

#### 3. Coordination Council established into case of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili

Tamila Lapanashvili, the wife of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili, kept in imprisonment by the occupational regime, says she hopes that his husband will be released during the court trial scheduled for December 20 into Doctor Gaprindashvili's case.

According to Lapanashvili, a Coordination Council has been established into Doctor Gaprindashvili's case. "I have never said that state institutions are doing nothing. They are all involved and working actively. But we all want the result, the release of Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili. I believe that different mechanisms should be engaged that will justify efforts of both state agencies and the public," Lapanashvili said during the press conference (*1TV, December 17, 2019*).

#### **4. Member of Sakrebulo Erekle Kukhianidze arrived at occupational line**

"I wanted to put myself in the same condition as Doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili, violate their laws, explain to them and ask for assistance – Erekle Kukhianidze, a member of Tbilisi Sakrebulo (City Assembly) said in Sakorintlo village, located near the occupational line.

Kukhianidze said that he planned to enter the territory of occupied South Ossetia. He said he had crossed the so-called border line late last night and found himself somewhere in the bushes. "I wanted to surrender and talk in the language they understand," Kukhianidze said (*1TV, December 18, 2019*).

### **❖ Foreign Affairs**

#### **5. U.S. Congressmen Express 'Growing Concern' as Georgia 'Abandons Promised Political Reforms'**

Co-chairs of the U.S. Congressional Georgia Caucus Adam Kinzinger and Gerald E. Connolly sent a letter to Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, in which U.S. Congressmen expressed their "growing concern" about Georgian government's recent decision to backtrack on its key promise of proportional polls from 2020, as well as "the reports of violence against peaceful protestors."

"It is our hope that Georgian officials will resume negotiations immediately and pass this important reform package," the Congressmen said in a letter of December 13, adding that "Georgia has been working on these reforms for years with the European Union and the Venice Commission. This commitment was made not only to the international community, but most importantly to the Georgian people." (*Civil.ge, December 16, 2019*)

#### **6. Foreign Minister – Contradictory information reaches Washington, provision of adequate information is important**

Davit Zalkaliani, Georgian Foreign Minister commented about the letter sent to Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia in which U.S. Congressmen expressed their "growing concern" about Georgian government's recent decision to backtrack on its key promise of proportional polls from 2020, as well as "the reports of violence against peaceful protestors."

Zalkaliani said that the standpoint of the U.S. as being the main strategic partner of Georgia was important and recommendations about ongoing developments in Georgia were valuable.

However, according to Foreign Minister, much of the information provided to the U.S. side is contradictory and the evaluation will not harm the high-level cooperation with the American partners.

Foreign Minister named bipartisan Georgia Support Act passed by the U.S. House of Representatives as confirmation of the firm support of the U.S. to Georgia.

"We will have communication and the information about ongoing processes in the country will be supplied to them. Much contradictory information reaches Washington. Therefore, it is important that they have correct and adequate assessment of the situation in Georgia. We have and will have communication about ongoing processes, and our relations will not be cast a shade," Zalkaliani claimed (*1TV, December 17, 2019*).

#### **7. Gia Volski - I am quite surprised by assessments and information that our fellow Congressmen have**

"I am quite surprised by the assessments and information that our fellow Congressmen have including in connection with June 20-21 events – First Vice-Speaker of the Parliament Gia Volski told reporters when commenting about the letter sent to Georgian Prime Minister by the U.S. Congressmen.

Volski considers it necessary to provide international partners with additional information on current developments in the country. "I think it is necessary to provide a detailed answer, not only in a written form but also factual material, and our colleagues will probably be able to do it during their visit in Washington," Volski said (*ITV, December 17, 2019*).

#### **8. Georgia in the National Defense Authorization Act 2020**

'Georgia is a valued friend of the United States and has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to advancing the mutual interests of both countries, including the deployment of Georgian forces as part of the former International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the current Resolute Support Mission led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan and the Multi-National Force in Iraq.

The European Deterrence Initiative builds the partnership capacity of Georgia so it can work more closely with the United States and NATO, as well as provide for its own defense.

In addition to the European Deterrence Initiative, Georgia's participation in the NATO initiative Partnership for Peace is paramount to interoperability with the United States and NATO, and establishing a more peaceful environment in the region.

Despite the losses suffered, as a NATO partner, Georgia is committed to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan with the fourth-largest contingent on the ground.

Congress reaffirms United States support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders, and does not recognize the independence of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions currently occupied by the Russian Federation; and supports continued cooperation between the United States and Georgia and the efforts of the Government of Georgia to provide for the defense of its people and sovereign territory,' the document reads (*ITV, December 18, 2019*).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **9. Opposition continues picketing and plans to hold demonstrations in Zugdidi and Batumi**

"Extraordinary sessions of parliament are scheduled for this week and picketing of the Parliament building is planned for Thursday. We do not allow the authorities to do insidious things. The picketing will start since the morning. Demonstrations will be held in Zugdidi and Batumi on this Saturday and Sunday," – he added. According to Ugulava, the last round of negotiations of this year with ruling team is scheduled for Friday (*ITV, December 16, 2019*).

#### **10. Police detain four persons after clash in Tbilisi City Assembly**

Police have detained four persons after the clash in Tbilisi City Assembly (Sakrebulo) – Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) reported.

The Ministry said that the mentioned people were arrested under Articles 166 and 173 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, involving petty hooliganism and disobedience to lawful requests of a police officer.

The situation in the City Council escalated after the activists and opposition MPs set up a tent in the reception area of the room of Sakrebulo member Erekle Kukhianidze, demanding his resignation. Patrol police officers forced the activists and opposition MPs out of the room (*1TV, December 17, 2019*).

### **11. Police Blamed, as Teen, 15, Succumbs to Injuries after Attempted Suicide in Tbilisi**

A 15-year-old boy, who according to media reports, plunged to his death in an attempted suicide on December 12, succumbed to his injuries at Tbilisi's Iashvili Children's Hospital this evening.

Early on, the media implicated police misconduct in the affair, alleging – based on the statement by victim's mother – that the boy was psychologically pressured during the Police interrogation.

According to reports, the the boy was interrogated in the First Police Unit of Tbilisi's Didube-Chugureti district on December 10-11, as the Police was investigating appearance of offensive spray-painted graffiti in the corridors and the courtyard of one of Tbilisi's private secondary schools the night before. The victim, according to the school officials, studied there earlier, but was moved to a public school at parent's request a while ago.

According to mother's reports, who attended the interrogation of a minor, police investigators have pressured her son to confess and she was too shocked to intervene. She also reported, according to the media, that at one point the investigator has removed her son from the room, and he returned to the room crying.

Investigator had been detained on this occasion. (*Civil.ge, December 17, 2019*).

### **12. Opposition parties cancel picketing of parliament planned for December 19**

"We feel great sadness over the death of Luka Siradze. It is impossible to find words of comfort in these difficult minutes. First of all, we would like to express our condolences to the family, friends, and relatives over this terrible tragedy. This story shook whole Georgia.

This is not the first case, and will not be the last one until we make systematic changes in the country. The tragedy of Luka has made us to decide to cancel the picketing of Parliament building scheduled for tomorrow, but that does not mean that we reject other forms of a nonviolent protest," the statement said (*1TV, December 18, 2019*).

### **13. Georgian Officials Offer Condolences on Teen's Death in Tbilisi**

Georgian officials offered condolences over the death of a 15-year-old boy, who succumbed to his injuries following an attempted suicide at Tbilisi's Iashvili Children's Hospital yesterday.

Expressing his "deep sorrow," for the teen's "tragic death," Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stated on December 18 that everyone whose blame will be confirmed, will be "severely punished despite their rank and status."

In the today's statement, PM Gakharia called on the Interior and Education Ministries to "fully cooperate" with the "open and transparent" investigation, launched by the State Inspector's Office (a newly established body mandated to investigate crimes committed by police and public officials) (*Civil.ge, December 18, 2019*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

### **14. Anaklia Development Consortium: We have identified an investor who is still interested in the project**

The potential investor needs to see direct support and approval from the Government for the project as well as for them. So far, the Government has not provided such direct support and approval, – reads the [statement](#) released by Anaklia Development Consortium (1TV, December 16, 2019).

#### **15. Ministry of Infrastructure: Anaklia Development Consortium has not provided contract documentation**

The Anaklia Development Consortium has not provided the contract documentation yet, – Georgian Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure told Georgian First Channel. The interim deadline for Consortium to submit bank loan agreements expired on December 16.

Besides, December 31 is the deadline for the Consortium to raise its capital and sign relevant contracts for completion of port construction project.

The government had the right to terminate relations with the current investor due to non-compliance with obligations. Reportedly, the postponement of terms is not planned (1TV, December 16, 2019).

#### **16. Natia Turnava - I cannot see the prospect of postponing Anaklia Port project**

"I don't want to speak prematurely. Let's wait for the deadline, but, of course, we do not have high expectations. As for the postponement of the project, this is completely unreasonable. This project delayed because of which our economy suffered enough. I personally cannot see the prospect of postponing the project" – said the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development (1TV, December 18, 2019).

#### **17. IMF Completes the fifth review of the extended arrangement under the extended fund facility for Georgia**

"The recent high headline inflation rate reflects both temporary factors and the impact of the lari's depreciation. The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) has appropriately tightened monetary policy to address inflationary pressures. Exchange rate flexibility remains vital as a shock absorber for the Georgian economy, and foreign exchange interventions should be limited to addressing excessive volatility or building reserves.

The 2020 budget appropriately targets a neutral fiscal stance while increasing spending on education and social benefits. Continued vigilance against fiscal risks stemming from power purchasing agreements and state-owned enterprises is needed to safeguard investment in infrastructure and human capital while maintaining debt sustainability. A new indexation rule for basic pensions needs to protect pensioners' income against inflation while preserving budget flexibility to provide space for more targeted social spending in the future.

Advancing financial and structural reforms would make the economy more resilient to shocks and sustain higher and more inclusive medium-term growth. Effective and timely implementation of the education reform would help create a more skilled labor force, enhancing medium-term growth and new frameworks for banking resolution and insolvency should help strengthen financial resilience and improve the business environment. Completing the establishment of the funded pension pillar, should help mobilize savings for investment to support medium-term growth and provide an additional safety net for the elderly.

The extension of the IMF program should support the authorities' efforts in maintaining policy discipline and implementing these reforms," Tao Zhang stressed (1TV, December 18, 2019).








## **Additional Information**

**December 19, 2019**

### **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.9055 GEL	1 GBP - 3.8082 GEL	100 RUB -4.6421 GEL
1 EUR - 3.2356 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4922 GEL	100 JPY - 2.6544 GEL

Thursday 19 December	Friday 20 December	Saturday 21 December	Sunday 22 December	Monday 23 December
				
8° 14°	2° 16°	2° 9°	3° 11°	4° 13°

-  **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](#)**