

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

January 23-26

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Leonid Dzapshba plans to run for so called presidential election of occupied Abkhazia

Former so-called Minister of the Interior of occupied Abkhazia Leonid Dzapshba has submitted the application to run for the so-called presidential by-elections scheduled for March 22.

According to Dzapshba, he will create the ruling team not of personal bias, but based on professional merits. Dzapshba said that he is a supporter of the urgent adoption of an anti-corruption law before the so-called presidential election in occupied Abkhazia. Leonid Dzapshba already participated in the "presidential election" in Abkhazia in 2014 and 2019 (*Civil.ge, January 24, 2020*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

2. Tskhinvali Temporarily Opens Crossing Point for Certain Group of Akhalgori Residents

On January 24, occupied Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia temporarily opened the Odzisi (Mosabrundi) crossing point for a certain group of Akhalgori Municipality residents, enabling them to travel to Tbilisi-administered territory.

The State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) confirmed to Civil Georgia that the crossing point has been opened only for a certain category of people, and noted that representatives of occupying regime did not clarify how long it will stay open.

Based on SSG, as of now, there are 24 residents of occupied Akhalgori Municipality on the Tbilisi-administered territory, and all of them are pensioners.

Reminder: *Tskhinvali closed its crossing points connecting the occupied region with Georgia proper in September 2019, amid the Chorchana/Tsnelisi crisis.*

According to the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM), in normal days, Odzisi crossing point is crossed approximately 400 times daily (Civil.ge, January 24, 2020).

3. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Netherlands arrived at occupation line

Stef Blok, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, visited the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia. EU Monitoring Mission releases this information.

Stef Blok met Dutch Monitors deployed to the Mission and expressed his gratitude to them, and the EUMM overall for its essential contribution to regional security and stability.

The Dutch Foreign Minister also appreciated the continuing efforts by the Mission to improve the quality of monitoring and reporting, including technological upgrades used by the Mission.

"I am concerned about the situation along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) and its implications for people on the ground. Therefore I very much support the EUMM in its crucial role as monitoring

mission and in building confidence amongst conflicting parties”, – Stef Blok added (*Civil.ge, January 23, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Four US Congressmen Address Georgian PM with ‘Concerns over Political Targeting, Declining Economic Trend’

The four Members of the U.S. Congress, House Georgia Caucus Co-Chairs Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) and Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA), House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Eliot L. Engel (D-NY) and House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Michael McCaul (R-TX), sent a letter to Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia on January 21, in which they raised “grave concerns over political targeting and a declining economic trend that spells trouble for Georgia’s path towards democratic reform and Western integration.”

“We write as Members of Congress that have been longtime supporters of Georgia’s path toward democratic reform and Western integration,” the four Congressmen wrote, also noting that “however, as some of us expressed to you in our letter from December 13, 2019, we are concerned over the decision to forego promised democratic reforms and the associated violence against peaceful protesters.” “We are also alarmed by the politicization of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port project,” they stressed (*Civil.ge, January 23, 2020*).

5. U.S. Congressman Babin Concerned over Georgia’s ‘Backsliding from Democratic Values’

On January 23, a member of the U.S. Congress, Brian Babin (R-TX) wrote a letter to Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia “because of delayed reforms and a declining climate for U.S. investment in Georgia.” Congressman Babin said he is writing to “add my voice to increasing concerns regarding Georgia’s continued backsliding from democratic values and the associated deterioration of its economic prosperity.”

“With this in mind, I join with my colleagues in Congress who represent the Georgia Caucus, Chairman Adam Kinzinger and Chairman Gerry Connolly, in their recent letter to you of December 13, 2019 that highlighted concern over the decision to forego promised democratic reforms, as well as reports of violence against associated peaceful protests,” Congressman Babin said, further noting that he shares the message conveyed by Congressman Markwayne Mullin’s recent letter to PM Gakharia (*Civil.ge, January 24, 2020*).

6. Opposition Publicizes U.S. Senator Wicker’s Letter to PM Gakharia

On January 25, opposition’s United National Movement party publicized U.S. Senator Roger Wicker’s December 19 letter addressed to Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia.

“As a strong ally of the Republic of Georgia, I have been glad to see the accomplishments and strides your country has made over the last sixteen years,” the U.S. Senator said in the beginning of the letter, noting that “since the Rose Revolution, concrete actions to strengthen institutions, including several rounds of judicial reform, and an energized and engaged civil society make your country one of the most democratic republics to emerge from the former Soviet Union.”

U.S. Senator also spoke of “concern that a recent spate of criminal prosecutions has created the appearance of the targeting of political opponents and independent media outlets.” He stressed that

“recent remarks from Georgian Dream Chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili that seem to threaten political opposition with “time in jail” deepen unease about the timing and circumstances of court cases against prominent opposition politicians such as Giga Bokeria and Nika Melia.”

The U.S. Senator then said that “with elections less than a year away, I encourage your government to move quickly to adopt an electoral system that would enjoy broad public support and ensure a level playing field for all,” noting that “if these measures go unaddressed, the mounting level of distrust in Georgia’s democratic institutions could undercut the legitimacy of the next year’s election and the country’s judiciary writ-large.”

A member of the Republican Party, Roger F. Wicker has represented Mississippi in the United States Senate since December 2007. Wicker is the chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation for the 116th Congress. He is the chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission and Vice President of the OSCE’s Parliamentary Assembly (Civil.ge, January 25, 2020).

7. NATO-Georgia Commission Meets in Brussels

On January 22, Georgian State Minister For Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili and First Deputy Foreign Minister Vakhtang Makharoblishvili discussed human rights and security situation in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia at the NATO-Georgia Commission in Brussels, Belgium.

Addressing the commission members yesterday, State Minister Tsikhelashvili spoke of the “ongoing Russian occupation” and continued “borderization,” arbitrary detentions, violations of human rights, and deaths of Georgian citizens in occupied regions.

“I spoke particularly critically about the humanitarian crisis in Akhalkalaki... We asked our partners to help, among others, through communication with Russia over the issue to immediately and unconditionally restore the movement [across the dividing line],” Tsikhelashvili stated (*Civil.ge, January 23, 2020*).

8. Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu: Georgia Should Become NATO Member

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who is participating in the World Economic Forum’s 50th annual meeting in Davos on January 21-24, said his country believes that NATO needs enlargement and called for Georgia’s membership in the Alliance.

Speaking at a panel discussion The Future of NATO on January 23, Çavuşoğlu said: “I don’t understand why we have not invited Georgia or we haven’t activated the [membership] action plan for Georgia.”

He then noted that while Turkey is being “criticized for having relatively better relations with Russia as neighbor,” its “western friends are not inviting or not agreeing to invite Georgia with the pretext that we should not provoke Russia.”

“But Georgia needs us, and we need an ally like Georgia,” Çavuşoğlu said, adding that Turkey believes that NATO needs enlargement and that “Georgia should also become a NATO member.” (*Civil.ge, January 23, 2020*)

9. Georgia in TI’s 2019 Corruption Perception Index

Georgia’s ranking in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI) has deteriorated slightly, slipping by two points from 2018.

In the 2019 CPI, released by the anti-corruption watchdog on January 23, 2020, Georgia is ranked 44th among 180 countries with a score of 56 (on a scale where 0 is the worst and 100 is the best result), the highest figure in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. Georgia shares 44th place with Costa Rica, Czech Republic and Latvia.

In 2018, Georgia was ranked 41st among 180 countries with a score of 58. In 2017, Georgia's score stood at 56, and it ranked 46th among 180 countries, while in 2016, Georgia was placed 44th with a score of 57. Georgia's CPI score was 52 in 2012, 49 in 2013, and 52 in 2014 and 2015 (*Civil.ge, January 23, 2020*).

10. PM Gakharia Concludes Davos Visit

On January 23, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia spoke of perspectives of cooperation with the European Union at the panel discussion "New Ambitions for Europe," on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum's 50th annual meeting, held in the Swiss ski resort of Davos on January 21-24.

PM Gakharia stressed that Georgia is the leader of the Eastern Partnership, adding that his country's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations are "the choice of our citizens." Georgian PM noted that for the last five years, Georgia has "real and very tangible achievements" on its European integration path, such as the free trade agreement, as well as the visa-free regime with the EU.

However, Gakharia said, the country has "some challenges" in the areas of security and economy as well. Referring to economy, he said, the challenge is "how to translate these achievements and this legal framework in real benefit for our citizens." (*Civil.ge, January 24, 2020*)

11. Three citizens of Georgia are currently in Wuhan

Three citizens of Georgia are currently in Wuhan, which is named as the epicentre of coronavirus spread. Georgia's Ambassador to China Archil Kalandia told the Georgian First Channel about it. Kalandia says Georgian citizens feel safe.

"At this time three our fellow citizens are in Wuhan town. We are in constant contact with them. They feel safe and their health is not under threat now. I have high hopes that they will not be subjected to danger in the future.

We communicate with our fellow citizens in other regions as well. They also feel healthy. They often get in touch through the Embassy's hotline that works in the 24-hour regime and therefore we have full information", – Ambassador said (*1TV, January 24, 2020*).

12. Georgian Ambassador to China – Georgian citizens being in Wuhan feel safe

There are three Georgian citizens currently in Wuhan, which is considered to be the epicentre of coronavirus spread. Georgia's Ambassador to China Archil Kalandia told the Georgian First Channel that the Georgian citizens feel safe. They are provided with food products and have the necessary medicines.

The Georgian Embassy in China warns Georgian citizen to refrain from travelling to the city of Wuhan, which is named as the epicentre of coronavirus spread.

Also, the Embassy recommends Georgian citizens being in China to use facemasks and avoid public gathering places. The Embassy also published a hotline through which the Georgian citizens can ask for assistance upon the need: +86 13716877635 (*1TV, January 25, 2020*).

13. Georgia in Green, low risk zone for spread of coronavirus

Amiran Gamkrelidze, Head of the National Center for Diseases Control and Public Health said that Georgia is in the Green, low-risk zone for the spread of coronavirus and there is no ground for panic. According to Gamkrelidze, there is a risk of importing the virus from China but Georgia does its best to prevent the infection. The algorithm is elaborated by the World Health Organization and the text is translated into three languages to be distributed for incoming tourists especially from China. Four medical institutions – Hospitals of Infectious Diseases in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi and Zugdidi – are ready to provide medical assistance to persons who are detected with symptoms of fever, headache, sore throat, breathing difficulties and coughing (*1TV, January 25, 2020*).

14. Recommendations passengers get at Tbilisi International Airport regarding coronavirus

Travelers to Wuhan (China) should:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid animals (alive or dead), animal markets, and products that come from animals (such as uncooked meat).
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Older travelers and those with underlying health issues may be at risk for more severe disease and should discuss travel to Wuhan with their healthcare provider.

If you traveled to Wuhan (China) and experience following symptoms within 2 weeks: fever cough difficulty breathing you should:

— Seek medical care right away. Before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.

— Avoid contact with others.

— Not travel while sick.

— Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.

— Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. In case you experience the above-mentioned symptoms please call: Hotline Number: 15 05 (24/7) Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories, Health, Labor and Social Affairs

Phone Number: 116 001(Monday to Friday, 10:00-17:00) National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (*1TV, January 25, 2020*).

15. Medics examine passengers at Tbilisi International Airport

"We have already examined seven passengers, none of them has a fever," Dr Nana Demuria told reporters. She explained that the passengers are being examined regarding the coronavirus.

"Symptoms may include cough, fever, a general feeling of being unwell. We should examine passengers for any of these symptoms. If the passengers are experiencing symptoms, they will be taken to Tbilisi infectious hospital for further treatment," the doctor said (*1TV, January 26, 2020*).

16. US to carry out USD 7-million educational program in Georgia

The US will carry out USD 7-million educational program in Georgia within the framework of the US-Georgia Strategic Partnership Charter.

According to the Georgian Ministry of Education, a working meeting was held at the US Department of State that was attended by Irine Abuladze, Deputy Georgian Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports and Vakhtang Makharoblishvili, Deputy Georgian Foreign Minister.

The US side was represented by Aleisha Woodward, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and Alexander Sokolovsky, Deputy Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (*ITV, December 25, 2020*).

17. Bidzina Ivanishvili met with the new Israeli Ambassador to Georgia

The Chairman of the Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (GD) Bidzina Ivanishvili met with the new Israeli Ambassador to Georgia Ran Gidor, the GD's Press Office reports.

The sides accentuated the meaning and importance of the 26 Century Israel-Georgian friendship.

"I arrived three weeks ago in Tbilisi as the new Israeli Ambassador to Georgia. I wanted to thank you personally as a great friend of Israel. I know that when you were Georgian PM you visited Israel. Hope to see you again in my country. Thank you very much for being a great friend and supporter of the Jewish community in Georgia," Ran Gidor stressed.

Bidzina Ivanishvili hopes the 26 Century Israel-Georgian friendship will deepen.

"Historically you know our attitude and my personal attitude towards this state and nation. I love the Jewish people tremendously. Two weeks ago, we sent off former Israeli Ambassador to Georgia Shabtai Tsur. I am proud to call him my friend. I believe, the new ambassador will be as good as the previous one. I hope the 26 Century Israel-Georgian friendship that makes two nations proud, will deepen," Bidzina Ivanishvili said (*ITV, December 26, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

18. New Independent Inspector Appointed

On January 23, the High Council of Justice (HCoJ) appointed Zurab Aznaurashvili as new Independent Inspector – responsible for uncovering possible disciplinary misconduct by judges – for a five-year term. According to the HCoJ, nine out of its sitting 15 members supported Aznaurashvili's candidacy through an open ballot.

HCoJ is in charge of overseeing the judiciary with the authority to appoint or dismiss judges, as well as to initiate disciplinary proceedings against them.

Independent Inspector has the authority to initiate disciplinary proceedings and conduct preliminary examination against a judge, independently from the HCoJ.

The position of Independent Inspector became vacant after Ketevan Tsintsadze was confirmed by the Parliament as one of the 14 judges for the lifetime tenure at the Supreme Court on December 12, 2019 (*Civil.ge, January 23, 2020*).

19. Ombudsperson Says Disclosure of Her Prison Meetings 'Illegal,' Penitentiary Service Denies Allegations

On January 24, Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria released a statement in response to the yesterday's "illegal public disclosure" of her recent visit to one of the penitentiary facilities in Tbilisi, which was publicized by the Special Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice.

Nino Lomjaria calls on the Prosecutor General's Office "to immediately launch an investigation" under Article 352 of the Criminal Code on "influencing the Public Defender in any manner in order to interfere with his/her official duties."

On January 23, the Penitentiary Service reported that earlier that day, few minutes after 6pm, (that is the end of prison's working day) Nino Lomjaria and her deputy Giorgi Burjanadze visited N9 penitentiary facility.

The Penitentiary Service further noted that Lomjaria and Burjanadze met with former officials Irakli Okruashvili and Vano Merabishvili, as well as Kakhaber Nakani, convicted for a high-profile case of 2006. It also noted that the Ombudsperson required to meet with Guram Donadze as well. However, the latter refused to meet the Ombudsperson (*Civil.ge, January 24, 2020*).

20. Patriotic Alliance of Georgia held a rally in front of U.S. Embassy in Georgia

As the protesters say, they "address the U.S. government to end malicious activities of NDI and IRI in Georgia."

"We call for a ban on the activities of NDI and IRI in Georgia, to terminate this lie."

"We will fill in the U.S. government, Congressman, Senators, members of the European Parliament about our demands," Irma Inashvili, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament stressed (*ITV, January 26, 2020*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

21. Highest rate of wine export recorded in history of independent Georgia

About 94 million bottles (0.75 litres) of wine were exported to 53 different countries in 2019. Export of Georgian wine increased by 9% in 2019 in comparison to 2018.

The National Wine Agency of Georgia released this information. According to the Agency, the highest rate of wine export was recorded in the history of independent Georgia in 2019. The cost of the exported wine amounted USD 240 million, which is 17 % more than in 2018.

"Export increased to strategic markets including Poland – 17 % (4114972 bottles), China – 2 % (7089259 bottles), the US – 48 % (678148 bottles) and the UK – 60 % (168307 bottles).

Growth is also noticeable in the following countries: Lithuania – 45 % (708408 bottles), Germany – 40 % (671 453 bottles), Belarus – 74 % (2787065 bottles), Israel – 80 % (324700 bottles), Estonia – 20 % (693248 bottles).), Russia – 9 % (58384540 bottles), Moldova – 8738 % (625724 bottles), the Netherlands – 17 % (96464 bottles), the Czech Republic – 34 % (83136 bottles), Sweden – 636 percent (92214 bottles), Bulgaria – 30 Approx i (34734 bottles), Mongolia – 40 % (297576 bottle), etc", – reads the information published by National Wine Agency (*Civil.ge, January 23, 2020*).

Additional Information

January 27, 2020

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.8870 GEL

1 GBP - 3.7823 GEL

100 RUB - 4.6730 GEL


1 EUR - 3.1870 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4858 GEL


100 JPY - 2.6351 GEL


Monday 27 January	Tuesday 28 January	Wednesday 29 January	Thursday 30 January	Friday 31 January
				
-2° 8°	1° 9°	1° 11°	2° 12°	2° 9°

 **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](#)**