

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

February 3-5

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Watchdog Speaks of 'Mass Human Rights Violations' Along Russian Occupation Line

The local watchdog, Human Rights Center (HRIDC), stated in its recent report that throughout 2019 "the representatives of the Russian Federation continued mass human rights violations" along the occupation line dividing Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia from Georgia proper.

According to the [report](#), as a result of continued 'borderization' and marking of new areas on the Tbilisi-controlled territory, many locals living along the dividing line between occupied Tskhinvali region and Georgia proper, "lost their agricultural plots, which were the only source of income for their families."

HRIDC further added that "in some instances, as a result of the illegal 'borderization,' the local population lost their houses together with the land, which turned up on the other side of the dividing line after the so-called 'border' signs were erected." The watchdog also noted that "the representatives of the Russian border forces continue arbitrary detention of people" in the areas, where locals had free access before (*Civil.ge, February 4, 2020*).

#### 2. Activists set up tents in Sokhumi

About 20 activists set up tents outside the so-called parliament building in Sokhumi city of occupied Abkhazia region. The protesters demand adoption of anti-corruption law.

The activists wrote in the social network that negotiations with the de-facto Abkhazian lawmakers had turned out fruitless (*1TV, February 4, 2020*).

#### 3. De facto Abkhazian gov't imposes quarantine on 'borders'

In order to prevent the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, the so-called government of Russian-occupied Abkhazia has imposed a quarantine on Enguri and Psou 'borders.' Only individuals with Abkhazian passport can enter the territory.

The decision was made at today's meeting. It is noteworthy that no such restriction was imposed on the border before (*1TV, February 4, 2020*).

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

#### 4. Georgian CSOs Address Intl Community over 'Humanitarian Crisis' in Occupied Akhlagori District

A group of 18 Georgian civil society organizations, including International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, Transparency International Georgia and Open Society Georgia Foundation, addressed the international community "with grave concern over the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the Akhlagori

district of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia," hoping that their "immediate action will protect the local population from further harm."

In an open letter released on February 3, the group speaks of importance of reopening Odzisi crossing point serving occupied Akhagori district that has been closed since September 2019, noting that it is "a lifeline for residents of the Akhagori district, many of whom commute daily to the rest of Georgia to receive medical care, education and social services, as well as to visit their relatives and family members."

#### **5. Occupying regime to close Akhagori crossing point again**

Akhagori district governor Nugzar Tinikashvili says the crossing point which opened ten days ago, will likely be closed tomorrow. Tinikashvili noted that only a small number of people managed to cross the border.

"A total of 1200 people cannot travel to Tbilisi-administered territory. Individuals without South Ossetian passport are not able to get their pension.

A lot of people need medical treatment. The decision about opening the "border" was good, however, 10 days are not enough," Tinikashvili stressed (*1TV, February 5, 2020*).

### **❖ Foreign Affairs**

#### **6. EPP 'Strongly Disappointed' by Georgian Dream Handling Political Crises**

European People's Party (EPP), the largest European-level political party of the center-right, is "strongly disappointed by the lack of political will of the ruling party to resolve the current political crises" in Georgia.

In the yesterday's [statement released](#) following its Political Assembly meeting in Brussels on February 3-4, the EPP said it "remains a strong supporter of democracy in Georgia," and "urges authorities to meet the demands of Georgian citizens, civil society, the opposition and friends of Georgia."

Supporting negotiations on the electoral system between the government and opposition, facilitated by the international community, the EPP calls upon the Georgian ruling majority "to ensure the introduction of an electoral system that has the support and trust of all stakeholders and ensures maximum proportionality of parliamentary representation in time before the 2020 elections."

It also calls on the Georgian government "to refrain from attempts to use the justice system against political opponents and to stop persecution of the opposition leaders." "Georgia has great potential and it is in the interest of both Georgia and the EU that the country's democratic achievements are not reversed," the EPP stated (*Civil.ge, February 5, 2020*).

#### **7. U.S. Senators Meet FM Zalkaliani, Reiterate Concern about Weakening Georgian Democracy**

U.S. Senators Jim Risch (R-Idaho), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), ranking member of the Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, met with Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani in Washington DC on February 4.

"Senator Shaheen and I had a productive conversation with Foreign Minister Zalkaliani today," Senator Risch said, noting that "after our recent letter to Prime Minister Gakharia, we reiterated our concerns about a weakening of Georgian democracy and governance."

Senator Risch further stated that the U.S. “remains committed to supporting Georgia’s transition towards democracy, but we must continue to see positive improvements. We are not asking Georgia to be perfect, but the government must show us it is serious about its pursuit of democracy.”

“We also discussed the current situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Georgian territories illegally occupied by Russia since 2008. The Russian Federation continues to move its fences into Georgia, annexing small bits of land each time,” the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman added (*Civil.ge, February 5, 2020*).

#### **8. Webster University to open campus in Georgia**

Founded in the U.S. in 1915, Webster University plans to open its campus in Georgia. The first campus will be opened on the territory of “Silicon Valley Tbilisi” where Business and Technology University (BTU) is located, the Press Office of the BTU said.

“The Enter of Webster University in our region will enable young people to receive American education and a diploma in Georgia from 2021,” BTU stressed.

The campuses of Webster University are located in various countries around the world, including the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Greece (*1TV, February 3, 2020*).

#### **9. Russian media - Moscow does not back the idea to resume direct flights between Russia and Georgia**

The idea to resume direct flights between Russia and Georgia was not supported at the meeting led by the Minister of Transport Eugene Dietrich on January 30, Russian media reports.

Eugene Dietrich held the meeting on temporary ban on all flights from China to Russia over coronavirus outbreak.

“During the meeting, the attendees negatively assessed the idea to resume direct flights between Russia and Georgia too,” *Commerzant* said. Russia suspended direct flights to Georgia on July 8, 2019 (*1TV, February 3, 2020*).

#### **10. The Minister of Internal Affairs meets Kelly Degnan**

The Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Vakhtang Gomelauri met with the newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, Kelly Degnan.

The parties have discussed opportunities for further deepening the successful cooperation between the two countries.

The Minister of Internal Affairs accentuated the importance of profitable collaboration in the fields of the fight against crime, crime prevention and border security (*1TV, February 4, 2020*).

#### **11. Archil Talakvadze to visit US**

The Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Archil Talakvadze, together with the Parliamentary Delegation, will pay a working visit to the United States on February 5-10.

Within the framework of the visit, the Speaker of the Parliament will participate in a yearly event called National Prayer Breakfast organized by the US President (*1TV, February 5, 2020*).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **12. Adjara TV’s Alternative Trade Unions on Deputy Director’s Resignation**

The alternative trade unions of Adjara TV and Radio company, a publicly-funded broadcaster based in Batumi, Georgia's port city located on the Black Sea coast, responded to the yesterday's resignation statement of the broadcaster's deputy director, Natia Zoidze, saying that it is nothing but the fact of "interference in editorial independence."

In a statement [released](#) on February 3, the alternative trade unions noted that Natia Zoidze's resignation is not an isolated case and that "the outflow of professional and principled staff from the broadcaster has already acquired a permanent nature." (*Civil.ge, February 3, 2020*)

### **13. Politicians, Human Rights Defenders on Tragedy in Western Georgia**

The Parliament of Georgia opened its Spring Session on February 4 with a moment of silence to honor six persons who were burned to death in the fire that erupted in Bagdati Municipality of Imereti Region in western Georgia last night. The death of socially vulnerable citizens triggered mixed reactions in Tbilisi.

The opposition, which planned to hold a picketing at the Parliament building to demand the transition to the proportional electoral system today, postponed its rally for February 5. Gigi Ugulava, leader of European Georgia called on the Parliament to postpone opening of its session for the next day as well. However, Parliament's Vice Speaker Gia Volski told reporters that "linking this issue with the session is a peak of speculation, which has nothing to do with morality."

Other members of the parliamentary majority and the opposition also commented on the tragedy. "We decided that making political statements would be irrelevant today," ruling party MP Mamuka Mdinardze said at the session, adding that postponement of the session for February 5 would mean violation of the Parliament's Rules of Procedure.

Asked by journalists what the government does to avoid hunger among children, Mdinardze said: "This tragedy has nothing to do with hunger. Fire and hunger have nothing in common." (*Civil.ge, January 4, 2020*)

### **14. Parliament Suspends MP Mandate to Georgian Dream's Karlo Kopaliani**

With 76 votes in favor and two against, the ruling Georgian Dream party MP Karlo Kopaliani has been suspended of his mandate at the Parliament's February 5 session.

Karlo Kopaliani has been appointed as the Head of Administration of Georgian Technical University. According to the Parliament's Rules of Procedure, the position is incompatible with a lawmaker's status. In his farewell address to the lawmakers, Karlo Kopaliani thanked the Georgian Prime Minister, the Parliament and the chairman of the ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili (*Civil.ge, February 5, 2020*).

### **15. Kakha Kaladze - A 100/50 model for 2020 elections is the best solution**

"A 100/50 model for 2020 elections is the best solution," the Secretary General of the ruling Georgian Dream party Kakha Kaladze echoed the initiative presented by the leader of the Alliance of Patriots Irma Inashvili. Kakha Kaladze hopes "the parties will agree on the version offered by the ruling Georgian Dream party."

In an interview with the Georgian First Channel, Irma Inashvili said the Alliance of Patriots' will initiate a 138/12 or 135/15 model for 2020 elections at the upcoming round of the dialogue on the electoral system (*1TV, February 5, 2020*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

### **16. Geostat: Annual Inflation 6.4% in January**

Georgia's annual inflation stood at 6.4% in January 2020 after it was registered at 7% in the previous month, the National Statistics Office (Geostat) reported on February 3. On a monthly basis prices were up by 0.7% in January.

The annual inflation rate was driven by higher prices in the group of food and non-alcoholic beverages (up by 11.3% y/y); alcoholic beverages and tobacco (up by 11.2% y/y); and transport (up by 3.3% y/y).

The monthly inflation rate was driven by the higher prices in the group of food and non-alcoholic beverages (up by 2.3% y/y); alcoholic beverages and tobacco (up by 1.8% y/y). The prices were down in recreation and culture (down by 4.5% y/y) (*Civil.ge, February 3, 2020*).

### **17. Number of international visitors hit record in January**

The number of international visitors has hit the record in January of 2020. The 633 201 international tourists visited Georgia in January. The number shows an increase in comparison to the same period of 2019 by 19.8%.

The statistics were published by the National Tourism Administration. The Tourism Administration informs that after Russia imposed an aviation ban on Georgia, the government carried out active marketing campaigns to reduce the negative results to a minimum and attract more international tourists (*1TV, February 3, 2020*).

### **18. Ministry of Health kicks off primary health care reform in Georgia**

Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia Ekaterine Tikaradze touched upon the reform of the primary health care in Georgia at the plenary sitting of the Parliament.

"We are launching a primary health care reform that will strengthen preventative services, increase the role and workload of the family and rural doctors. We will boost up the habit of visiting doctor regularly," Ekaterine Tikaradze said.

According to the Minister, about 400 outpatient clinics across the country are being rehabilitated by the Ministry of Infrastructure for the time being. By 2024, there will be 831 fully equipped outpatient clinics in the country (*1TV, February 5, 2020*).

## ❖ Sports and Culture

### **19. Rugby - Georgia to meet South Africa in Port Elizabeth**

South African Rugby named the six venues for the home tests in 2020, which also includes two matches against Scotland and Georgia in July.

The test for the Springboks (South Africa national rugby union team) against Georgia will be held at Nelson Mandela Stadium in Port Elizabeth on Mandela Day (Saturday, 18 July) (*1TV, February 5, 2020*).

## **Additional Information**

**May 2, 2019**

### **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.8577 GEL

1 GBP - 3.7327 GEL

100 RUB -4.5567 GEL


1 EUR - 3.1498GEL

1 TRY - 0.4777 GEL


100 JPY - 2.6057 GEL


Thursday 6 February	Friday 7 February	Saturday 8 February	Sunday 9 February	Monday 10 February
				
3° 15°	2° 13°	-2° 6°	-6° 1°	-5° 2°

 **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](#)**