

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

February 10-12

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## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### 1. New Head of EU Monitoring Mission Georgia Appointed

On February 11, the Council of the European Union appointed Marek Szczygieł as the new Head of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) Georgia.

Marek Szczygieł, 50, a long serving Polish diplomat is currently ambassador for emerging security challenges and Co-ordinator for International Cyber Policy in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previously, in 2011-2015 he served as Polish Ambassador to Bucharest. Earlier, Szczygieł served as Deputy Head of Polish Mission to OSCE and UN Office in Vienna (*Civil.ge, February 11, 2020*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### 2. Georgia Jails Opposition Leader Gigi Ugulava

The Supreme Court of Georgia has found Gigi Ugulava, one of the leaders of opposition European Georgia party, guilty of mispending GEL 48 million of public money from Tbilisi Development Fund, while serving as the mayor of the capital city, and sentenced him to three years and two months in jail.

The three-member chamber of the Supreme Court, consisting of former Chief Prosecutor and now Supreme Court judge Shalva Tadumadze, Giorgi Shavliashvili and Merab Gabinashvili deliberated on the case without oral hearing, depriving the parties of an opportunity to voice their arguments (*Civil.ge, February 10, 2020*).

### 3. Georgian Opposition Quits Election Talks, after Ugulava Jailed

The opposition parties decided to cease electoral reform talks with the ruling Georgian Dream party after it emerged on February 10 that the Supreme Court of Georgia sentenced Gigi Ugulava, one of the leaders of opposition European Georgia party, to imprisonment (*Civil.ge, February 10, 2020*).

### 4. Georgian Dream Calls on Opposition to Resume Election Talks

The ruling Georgian Dream party has called on the opposition to resume electoral reform talks, saying that "dialogue and consensus have no alternative."

Speaking at a news briefing on February 12, Mamuka Mdinardze, leader of the parliamentary majority, said that "it is an expectation of the public, as well as a recommendation of our international partners that will promote stabilization of processes and peaceful, constructive solution of existing challenges." (*Civil.ge, February 12, 2020*)

### 5. Georgian Ruling Party on Ugulava's Imprisonment

**Gia Volski, Parliament's Vice Speaker, Georgian Dream:** "The Prosecutor's Office has some claims that he has stolen GEL 50 million and think they should [have] appealed the case in the Supreme Court... It does not matter, whether he is a political figure or not... I regret [this] very much, I do not like someone being jailed, but my personal attitude towards this issue will not solve the case."

**Davit Matikashvili, Georgian Dream lawmaker:** "We live in the state, where everyone should be equal before the law... It is impossible to have professions or political parties in the countries, whose members are indulged from legal space... It is a clearly legal dispute... There is a tendency [in Georgia] that the cases involving an incumbent politician or former politicians are considered politically motivated... Generally, one should not be happy about the arrest of any person, but justice should be enforced; the law should [be upheld] in the country." (*Civil.ge, February 10, 2020*)

## **6. Opposition Comment on Ugulava's Imprisonment**

**Grigol Vashadze, the United National Movement:** "No matter how many of us they will jail, they will not be able to stop this wave [of protest]. Gigi Ugulava's imprisonment will encourage all opposition parties to sit down around the table and agree on a joint action plan."

**Davit Bakradze, European Georgia:** "[Bidzina] Ivanishvili's and Georgian Dream's decision to arrest Gigi Ugulava under any pretext was quite clear over the past months; but what happened today means that yet another shameful precedent has been established proving that there is no institution, no court, no justice in this country... The court has told us today that if Ivanishvili decides, he may charge you again no matter whether you have already served your sentence [or not]. It is no longer even an imitation of law; it is obvious illegality carried out by the Supreme Court today. Thus, in this situation, Georgian Dream should understand that this verdict announced against Gigi Ugulava is the verdict against the incumbent government. The government has crossed the line and the processes cannot be turned back... Only Georgia Dream is responsible for it and it will have to pay the price."

**Nino Burjanadze, Democratic Movement – United Georgia:** "An absolutely unimaginable decision was made... I do not remember an era [in Georgia], when a person was twice charged for one and the same crime... This is unimaginable. This is a violation of legal norms, neglecting these norms. It means that there is no law in Georgia. We already knew about it, but now it has been declared openly."

**Giorgi Vashadze, New Georgia:** "This step is the decision made by a coward man, hiding behind the court and the prosecutor's office, the decision of bandits from Georgian Dream. Now I am addressing them – be afraid; you will not be able to frighten us... Gigi Ugulava is a worthy person and he will meet the [court] ruling in a dignified way. Let me tell them that this year is the year of their end."

**Pikria Chikhradze, Lelo for Georgia:** "We can say from today [on] that Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgian Dream and Georgian government have moved to a new stage of repressions, a new stage of bloody repressions. It means that we have an absolutely destructive government, which has no arguments at the table of negotiations; the government, which believes that it will weaken opposition by arresting its leaders; the government, which has nothing to tell the international community... Therefore, if the government chooses the path of uncompromising confrontation, we are ready to be uncompromising in this struggle."

**Tamar Chugoshvili, independent lawmaker:** "This case has a political context and its political context is extremely negative; it actually put an end to the chance of achieving any political agreement [between the ruling party and the opposition] on other topics." (*Civil.ge, February 10, 2020*)

## **7. U.S. Embassy in Georgia on Collapse of Election Talks**

"The U.S. Embassy is disappointed that the timing and context of the conviction and sentencing of an opposition leader last night has put the dialogue at risk," the statement released by the U.S. Embassy on February 11 reads.

It also stressed that “an environment conducive to the successful continuation of the dialogue requires an independent, transparent judicial system free of political influence.”

“We call on all sides to remain committed to the political dialogue, as well as further refinements to the electoral code, as the best way to create the conditions for free and fair elections,” the statement reads (*Civil.ge, February 11, 2020*).

### **8. International Assessments on Georgian Opposition Leader’s Imprisonment**

**Adam Kinzinger, U. S. Congressman** (R-IL) and co-chair of the House Georgia Caucus, was first to publicly denounce Ugulava’s incarceration. “To say this is disturbing would be an understatement,” Kinzinger noted, adding that “using courts as a weapon is NOT Democracy.”

Kinzinger was followed by **Senator Jim Risch, chair of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee** (R-ID), who expressed disappointment over “increase of politically motivated abuse” of opposition politicians in Georgia. “As I told the Georgian foreign minister last week, collapse of judicial independence and persecution of opposition is unacceptable behavior,” said Senator Risch.

Concerns were raised by Linas Linkevičius, Lithuanian Foreign Minister as well, who slammed the court decision to sentence Ugulava to 38-month imprisonment. Linkevičius further stressed that “upcoming parliamentary elections will be a litmus test for democracy in Georgia.” (*Civil.ge, February 11, 2020*)

### **9. EU ‘Watches Closely’ Supreme Court Ruling against Gigi Ugulava**

The European Union is “scrutinizing closely” the recent ruling by the Georgian Supreme Court in the case against opposition European Georgia leader Gigi Ugulava.

In a statement released on February 12, Peter Stano, Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy said that “the EU will also continue to monitor all other trials in Georgia related to high profile cases.” (*Europa.eu, February 11, 2020*)

### **10. British Embassy in Georgia on Opposition Leader’s Imprisonment**

“Sentencing of opposition leader #Ugulava leaves unanswered questions around timing & process. Also impacts on dialogue on electoral system that will earn trust of #Georgia|n electorate. As friend & strategic partner, UK encourages steps to narrow divisions & reinforce democracy.” – reads the tweet of UK Embassy (*Twitter.com, February 11, 2020*).

### **11. U.S. Congressman Weber Concerned over Georgia’s “Backsliding from Democratic Values”**

On February 11, Randy Weber, a U.S. Congressman (R-Texas), published a letter addressed to Georgia’s Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, written to express concern “regarding Georgia’s continued backsliding from democratic values and the associated decline of its economic prosperity.” Congressman Weber’s address comes in a series of other letters sent by Congressmen from both sides of the aisle (*Civil.ge, February 12, 2020*).

### **12. Estonia, Sweden ‘Concerned’ about Gigi Ugulava’s Imprisonment**

Estonian Foreign Ministry tweeted that it is “following the ruling against Gigi Ugulava with concern.” It further added that “the circumstances around this verdict are not conducive to advancing the political dialogue aimed at a much needed depolarisation of the political situation in Georgia.”

Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde also commented on Ugulava’s verdict, noting that “Sweden shares EU concerns about circumstances around the Ugulava case.” “As a close friend of Georgia we call for steps to narrow divisions and uphold the highest standards of democracy and rule of law,” Minister Linde tweeted (*Civil.ge, February 12, 2020*).

### **13. European Parliament Members Slam Georgian Gov't over Ugulava Verdict**

Several members of the European Parliament [released statements](#) about Georgian Supreme Court's February 10 ruling that sent opposition European Georgia leader Gigi Ugulava to prison for 38 months. Civil.ge offers you an inexhaustive list of the comments by MEPs as follows:

"Georgian people deserve a country based on European values like democracy, human rights and rule of law," said MEP Viola von Cramon-Taubadel (Germany, Greens/European Free Alliance). She tweeted that "selective justice, underhanded litigations, and persecution of political opponents is unacceptable and damages Georgia." (*Civil.ge, February 12, 2020*)

### **14. Latvian Foreign Minister Concerned about Ugulava's Imprisonment**

Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs joined his Estonian and Swedish colleagues in expressing his concerns about the ruling of top court of Georgia that sent former Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava, leader of opposition European Georgia party, to 38 months in prison.

"Georgia's Supreme Court verdict in Gigi Ugulava case raises questions and concern," Minister Rinkēvičs tweeted on February 12, adding that "circumstances around it are not conducive to advance process of political dialogue."

"Judicial independence and rule of law are crucial elements of Georgia's European path," Latvian Foreign Minister concluded (*Civil.ge, February 12, 2020*).

### **15. Kati Piri - European Parliament can act as mediator between Georgian Gov't and Opposition**

"The recent sentencing of opposition leader Gigi Ugulava was discussed at today's meeting with our colleagues from the Georgian Dream party. On the outside, this verdict seems very unrealistic," the member of the European Parliament Kati Piri said in Strasbourg, as Secretary General of the ruling Georgian Dream party Kakha Kaladze and Executive Secretary of Georgian Dream Irakli Kobakhidze are holding bilateral meetings. The MEP says she is interested in the case details (*1TV, February 12, 2020*).

### **16. Georgian Dream proposes EU sending the fact finding mission over Gigi Ugulava's case**

The ruling Georgian Dream Party proposes European Union to send a fact finding mission to Georgia to study the case of Gigi Ugulava, former Tbilisi Mayor and one of the leaders of oppositional European Georgia Party.

"In addition to providing MEPs from the main political families with information on Ugulava case, we proposed dispatching MEPs fact finding mission to Georgia to scrutinize/assess the substance & procedural side of this criminal case to ensure full clarity," Kakha Kaladze, Tbilisi Mayor and General Secretary of Georgian Dream who is in Strasbourg wrote in the social network Twitter (*1TV, February 12, 2020*).

### **17. PES supports proposal for cross-party political group fact finding mission to Georgia**

The Party of European Socialists (PES) supports the proposal to send a fact-finding mission of members of European Parliament from the main political families in the European Parliament to Georgia to further investigate the case of Gigi Ugulava, former Tbilisi Mayor and one of the leaders of oppositional European Georgia Party.

"We welcome this step to improve the transparency of the Georgian judicial system. A mission led by colleagues from the S&D and the EPP would greatly help scrutinise and assess the substance of this case and bring more clarity," PES President Sergei Stanishev said (*1TV, February 12, 2020*).

## **18. Georgian Ombudsman links Ugulava Verdict with Controversial Supreme Court Appointments**

Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria said on February 11 that the Supreme Court's verdict to imprison Gigi Ugulava, one of the leaders of opposition European Georgia party, embodies the threats she aimed at averting when demanding the halt of the process of judicial appointments.

Lomjaria noted that Shalva Tadumadze, incumbent Supreme Court justice who presided over Ugulava's case in the top court, served as the Chief Prosecutor when the Prosecutor's Office was challenging Ugulava's case in the Court of Appeals, as well as in the Supreme Court (*Civil.ge, February 11, 2020*).

## **19. CSOs: Ugulava's Imprisonment Signals A Continuation of Political Persecution**

On February 11, twelve civil society organizations (CSOs), including Transparency International Georgia, International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, and Open Society Georgia Foundation, released a joint statement, noting that the yesterday's Supreme Court ruling to sentence former Tbilisi Mayor and opposition European Georgia leader Gigi Ugulava is "the continuation of political persecution by the authorities against their opponents." (*Civil.ge, February 11, 2020*)

## **20. Georgian Opposition Plans Rallies in April, Vows to Unveil Joint Election Plan**

Georgian opposition parties announced following a two-hour long meeting at the Labor Party's office today, that they will hold a protest rally on Tbilisi's main Rustaveli Avenue on April 4, where they will unveil a joint action plan for the upcoming parliamentary polls in October.

Prior to the April rally, the opposition plans to do picketing actions, to visit the regions of the country and to meet with the electorate, as well as international organizations. "Not a single vote to Georgian Dream" will be the key message of the opposition (*Civil.ge, February 11, 2020*).

## **21. Former Georgian President, PM on Ugulava's Imprisonment**

Georgia's ex-President Giorgi Margvelashvili and former Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili commented on the recent ruling by the Georgian Supreme Court in the case against opposition European Georgia leader Gigi Ugulava, saying that the justice system has been used for political purposes.

In the interview with TV Pirveli on February 11, Giorgi Margvelashvili said that Gigi Ugulava's imprisonment has "really changed" the political situation in the country, noting that ex-Mayor of Tbilisi, Gigi Ugulava is "a political prisoner." (*TV Pirveli, February 11, 2020*)

## **22. Court Clears Former Marneuli Mayor**

On February 12, Rustavi City Court acquitted former Marneuli Mayor, Temur Abazov, who was charged with inhuman and degrading treatment of a local resident.

Last February, Abazov filed a resignation to the Marneuli City Council, saying that he could not hold the same position with "such charges" leveled against him. In November 2019, Abazov was appointed as Vice President of the Georgian Powerlifting Federation.

Temur Abazov was arrested on charges of inhuman and degrading treatment of a local resident on June 13, 2018. Later the court sentenced him to a period pretrial detention. In December 2018, he was released after paying a GEL 10,000 bail (*Civil.ge, February 12, 2020*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

### **23. Anaklia Development Consortium to arbitrate its dispute with Georgian Government**

Anaklia Development Consortium is left with no choice but to arbitrate its dispute with the Georgian government; the Consortium's international investors will also be commencing proceedings against the Georgian government – reads the [statement](#) released by Anaklia Development Consortium (*Civil.ge, February 12, 2020*).

#### 24. US Company TRAMMO set to invest USD 20 million into Batumi Port

On February 11, Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Archil Talakvadze announced that he had a meeting with the CEO and Executive Board of US Company TRAMMO in New York. According to the statement of Talakvadze, the company is investing USD 20 Million in order to build new terminal in Batumi Port. The purpose of the investment will be connection of Asian and European markets.

Senior Vice President, Chief Financial Officer of TRAMMO, William E. Markstein visited Georgia in 2019 during Tbilisi Silk Road Forum and participated in the panel discussion "Development of Georgia – Supporting Target Investments", where he talked about opportunities and perspectives of Batumi as a new logistics hub. According to the statement of Markstein, the purpose of the logistic hub will be transportation of goods from Central Asia to Europe passing through Baku and railways to Batumi (*BM.GE, February 12, 2020*).

### ❖ Sports and Culture

#### 25. Tornike Shengelia named as best player at Spanish basketball championship






Tornike Shengelia, a Georgian professional basketball player who plays for the Spanish Saski Baskonia basketball team, has been named as best basketball player at Spanish basketball championship.








Shengelia was awarded as the 'giant of the year' (Premio Gigante del Año) by the liga Endesa, the top professional basketball division of the Spanish basketball league system (*1TV, February 12, 2020*).

### Additional Information

**February 13, 2020**  
**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.8686 GEL	1 GBP - 3.7237 GEL	100 RUB - 4.5363 GEL
1 EUR - 3.1317 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4745 GEL	100 JPY - 2.6090 GEL

<b>Thursday</b> 13 February	<b>Friday</b> 14 February	<b>Saturday</b> 15 February	<b>Sunday</b> 16 February	<b>Monday</b> 17 February
				
-1° 6°	-5° 7°	-2° 5°	-1° 11°	-1° 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](#)