

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

February 20-23

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

Date: **February 24, 2020**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

1. Zourabichvili warns the international community on the humanitarian situation in Tskhinvali

On 19 February, the Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili informed Director-General of World Health Organisation, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Commissioner of the Council of Europe for Human Rights on the prohibition of Georgia-produced medicines in the separatist Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) (*Caucasuswatch.de, February 20, 2020*).

2. Archil Tatunashvili's square opened in Tsilkani

The square in commemoration of Archil Tatunashvili, Georgian soldier killed by South Ossetian separatists was opened in Tsilkani village, northwest of Mtskheta. Two years passed today after Archil Tatunashvili's murder.

Tatunashvili's family members and friends, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili and Prime Minister's Advisor Sozar Subari attended the opening (*1TV, February 22, 2020*).

3. Giorgi Gakharia – The aim of Archil Tatunashvili's bravery as well as our objective is unification of Georgia

The biggest example of bravery in the latest years was that what Archil Tatunashvili did – Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said during the opening of square in Tsilkani village, northwest of Mtskheta in commemoration of Archil Tatunashvili, Georgian soldier killed by South Ossetian separatists. Two years passed today after Archil Tatunashvili's murder (*1TV, February 22, 2020*).

4. Anders Knape – Occupation is unacceptable

Anders Knape, President of the Local and Regional Authorities Congress of the Council of Europe, says that occupation is unacceptable.

Knape, who is being on a visit to Georgia, has expressed willingness to talk to locals residing in the conflict zone and inquire about their viewpoints about the current situation.

As Knape said, Georgia is one of the countries of the CoE the territories of which are occupied. "We have to continue discussions over the issue and we have to inform people both in Europe and beyond it about the situation in Georgia. It is important that we do not forget about the current situation in Georgia and Ukraine," Knape said (*1TV, February 22, 2020*).

5. CoE delegation visits Khurvaleti village

Within the framework of Georgia's chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of CoE, the representatives of the Council of Europe have visited the village of Khurvaleti, near de facto border today.

During the visit, the President of the Congress of the Council of Europe Anders Knappe learnt about the burdensome situation citizens face in the village of Khurvaleti. The delegation members spoke with people as well.

The delegation was hosted by the Prime Minister's Advisor Sozar Subari, Chairman of Tbilisi City Assembly (Sakrebulo) Giorgi Tkemaladze, and Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Tamar Taliashvili (*1TV, February 23, 2020*).

6. Occupants detain a 17-year-old boy in the village of Kirbali

Russian occupants have arrested a 17-year-old boy in the village of Kirbali in Gori Municipality, State Security Service of Georgia told Georgian First Channel.

As the Agency said, the hotline has been activated, the EUMM has been informed and negotiations are underway to release the teenager.

David Tsertsvadze, Gori municipality governor's representative said Aleksandre Shiukashvili was detained while he was in the forest, along the occupation line. The 17-year-old teenager was with his friends. His friends managed to run away (*1TV, February 22, 2020*).

7. Occupation regime releases detained teenager

The occupation regime has released a teenager, State Security Service of Georgia reports. Alexander Shiukashvili will meet his family at Shida Kartli Police Department.

Russian occupants have arrested a 17-year-old boy in the village of Kirbali in Gori Municipality earlier today (*1TV, February 23, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

8. Georgia ranks 49th in Global Militarisation Index

Georgia ranks 49th out of 154 countries in the Global Militarisation Index 2019. The Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) has published this report. It should be noted that in the previous 2018 survey, Georgia was on the 52nd place.

According to report, in this year's Global Militarisation Index ranking, the ten countries that provided the military with markedly large amounts of resources in relation to other areas of society are Israel, Singapore, Armenia, Cyprus, South Korea, Russia, Greece, Jordan, Belarus and Azerbaijan (*1TV, February 20, 2020*).

9. President's New Defense and Security Adviser Appointed

On February 20, Gela Giorgadze, army reserve officer, has been appointed as the President's new defense and security adviser, replacing Dimitri Lezhava, who served on the position since July 8, 2019.

According to the President's press office, in 1998-2019 Gela Giorgadze worked on various positions at the Georgian Defense Ministry, among others serving as Georgia's Defense Attaché to Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Germany and Switzerland (*Civil.ge, February 20, 2020*).

10. Int'l Human Rights Bodies Concerned Over Georgia's Treatment of Public Defender's Office

On February 21, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), in collaboration with a number of human rights institutions, published a statement to support the Public Defender's Office of Georgia, following "the [Georgian] state's breach of the confidentiality of the Public Defender's prison visits, and subsequent attacks on the institution." (*Civil.ge, February 21, 2020*)

11. Vladimer Konstantinidi: General Staff of Armed Forces of Russian Federation carried out cyber-attack on 28 October 2019

On 28 October 2019, a large scale cyber-attack was launched against the websites, servers and other operating systems of the Administration of the President of Georgia, the courts, various municipal assemblies, state bodies, private sector organisations and media outlets. As a result of the cyber-attack, the servers and operating systems of these organisations were significantly damaged, severely affecting their functionality.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia launched an investigation into the case under Articles 284 and 286, which implies to unauthorised access to the computer system and handling of computer data and/or computer systems (*1TV, February 20, 2020*).

12. Mike Pompeo: United States Condemns Russian Cyber Attack against Georgia

"On October 28, 2019, the Russian General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) Main Center for Special Technologies (GTsST, also known as Unit 74455 and Sandworm) carried out a widespread disruptive cyber-attack against the country of Georgia. The incident, which directly affected the Georgian population, disrupted operations of several thousand Georgian government and privately-run websites and interrupted the broadcast of at least two major television stations. This action contradicts Russia's attempts to claim it is a responsible actor in cyberspace and demonstrates a continuing pattern of reckless Russian GRU cyber operations against a number of countries. These operations aim to sow division, create insecurity, and undermine democratic institutions", – the statement reads (*1TV, February 20, 2020*).

13. The Pentagon - We pledge our support to Georgia and its people

U.S. Department of Defense pledges its support to Georgia and calls on Russia to stop harmful actions in the country, Pentagon spokeswoman Carla Gleason told VOA.

"This attack is another example of how Russia's malicious actions undermine transparency and stability, weaken the international order and violate the sovereignty of its neighbours.

The United States' standpoint remains clear – we will defend the core interests of our partners and allies, and will place the responsibility on the Russian Federation for its destabilizing activity," the statement reads.

Carla Gleason concluded that the Pentagon has joined the international community that attribute the responsibility for this cyber-attacks to intelligence services of the Russian Federation (*1TV, February 20, 2020*).

14. UK condemns Russia's GRU over Georgia cyber-attacks

"The GRU's reckless and brazen campaign of cyber-attacks against Georgia, a sovereign and independent nation, is totally unacceptable.

The Russian Government has a clear choice: continue this aggressive pattern of behaviour against other countries, or become a responsible partner which respects international law.

The UK will continue to expose those who conduct reckless cyber-attacks and work with our allies to counter the GRU's menacing behaviour," Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said.

15. President of Georgia condemns Russia over cyber-attacks

"With the 2019 cyberattack on our official website, Russia has attacked our sovereignty and national security by trying to paralyze the activities of state institutions, a blatant violation of international norms and a clear manifestation of the hybrid war against Georgia." – writes Zourabichvili on her Twitter (1TV, February 20, 2020).

16. European countries condemn Russia over Georgia cyberattack

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia said, "this reckless conduct shows yet again Russia's disrespect for the norms of responsible state behaviour and reduces stability in cyberspace."

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland joined the statements issued by Georgia, USA, UK and number of EU countries that attribute the responsibility for this cyber-attacks to intelligence services of the Russian Federation.

MFA of Poland said, "Government of Poland is seriously concerned with the reports on large-scale cyber-attacks against Georgia on 28 October 2019."

Czech MFA said "Czech condemns cyberattacks on Georgia from October 28, 2019. While we do not have the primary forensic evidence, in this case, we have no reason to doubt the attribution assessment made by our allies."

Lithuania MFA said, "Lithuania strongly reiterates its support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity and urges Russia to stop malicious cyber activities against Georgia."

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden "strongly condemns recurring state-sponsored cyber-attacks which violate existing norms for responsible state behavior, erode trust and threaten stability in cyberspace."

Denmark MFA shares "deep concern about Russia's disruptive cyber activities and will continue to promote a peaceful, free, open and secure cyberspace." (1TV, February 20, 2020)

17. Andrei Rudenko - Russia didn't plan to interfere in Georgia's internal affairs, and won't do so

"We leave these comments on those consciences that made these statements. Russia did not plan to interfere in Georgia's internal affairs, and will not do so in any way," said Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Andrei Rudenko (1TV, February 20, 2020).

18. Russian Foreign Ministry calls cyber attack accusations groundless and politically motivated

"Noteworthy is the synchronization of the propaganda campaign organized by Washington, London, Tbilisi and others. It took almost four months to try to put blame on Russia for the incident, which allegedly took place on October 28 last year." – the statement released by Russian MFA reads.

Russian state agency notes that all allegations against the Russian side are still under assumption. The statement notes that the normalization of Russian-Georgian relations is in the interests of the population of both countries, though some forces do not support it (1TV, February 21, 2020).

19. The Washington Post publishes [article](#) on Russian cyber-attack against Georgia

"The United States joined several countries on Thursday in accusing Russia of a major cyberattack in the Republic of Georgia, pledging to hold the Kremlin accountable.

The Oct. 28 attack knocked thousands of government and private websites offline and interrupted television broadcasts.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the Pentagon said in statements that the Russian military intelligence agency known as the GRU had carried out the attack. Pompeo's statement specifically blamed a Russian hacking unit known as Sandworm, tying it for the first time to the GRU" – reads the article (*Washingtonpost.com, February 21, 2020*).

20. CNN- US and UK accuse Russia of major cyber attack on Georgia

The US, UK, and Georgia accused the Russian military Thursday of being behind a major 2019 cyber attack on Georgia that disrupted "several thousand Georgian government and privately-run websites and interrupted the broadcast of at least two major television stations." – reads the [article](#) (*CNN.COM, February 20, 2020*).

21. The Telegraph - British spies blame Russian intelligence unit for cyber attack on Georgia

Security services have blamed the Russian intelligence 'Sandworm' unit for a cyberattack on Georgia, amid fears it could be the start of a wider destabilisation campaign.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab described the online assault, which downed the former Soviet state's national broadcasters and websites in October, as "totally unacceptable".

The UK Government has publically named the GRU unit, which has previously been linked with a botched hack on the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons as well as on the Foreign Office and Porton Down, the UK's chemical weapons testing laboratory, in the wake of the Skripal assassination attempt (*thetelegraph.co.uk, February 21, 2020*).

22. Georgia has new Ambassadors in UK, Greece and Germany

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Sophio Katsarava (*Former Member of Parliament, she left the post and Georgian Dream after the ruling party failed to achieve constitutional changes on the proportional election model*) will serve as Georgian Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Davit Dondua (*Former Minister of Foreign Affairs*) will be Georgia's Ambassador in Greece and Levan Izoria (*Former Minister of Defence, Former Secretary of the National Security Council, stepped down to take the post of Ambassador of Georgia to Germany after the viral video of his brother verbally confronting and abusing police officers had been publicized; although, he does not connect his resignation and appointment to the post to the above-mentioned incident*) will take the post of Ambassador in Germany (*1TV, February 21, 2020*).

23. MFA of Georgia calls on Georgian citizens to refrain from travelling to Iran in wake of coronavirus

"Citizens of Georgia in Iran can contact Embassy of Georgia to the Islamic Republic of Iran on the hotline: +989352110274; +989122997726; +989108201041," the Foreign Ministry stressed (*MFA.GOV.GE, February 22, 2020*).

24. 34 Georgian citizens evacuated from China stay in Sachkhere Medical Center

34 Georgian citizens evacuated from China have been placed at a hotel of Sachkhere Medical Center. The area is controlled by law enforcement, security measures are tightened. As Doctor Maia Kheladze told the First Channel, none of them has the temperature.

34 Georgian citizens were evacuated from China earlier this week. A group of epidemiologists and doctors met them at Tbilisi International Airport. At the airport checkup, no suspicious symptoms of coronavirus have been detected (*1TV, February 23, 2020*).

25. Georgian PM - All necessary mechanisms will be activated to ensure effective fight against coronavirus

“All necessary mechanisms will be activated to ensure effective fight against the novel coronavirus in Georgia,” Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia told the press in response to a question about a possible suspension of flights from Iran in order to stave off the spread of coronavirus (*1TV, February 23, 2020*).

26. Georgian gov't suspends flights to and from Iran

In the wake of the coronavirus outbreak in Iran, the Georgian government has decided to suspend flights to and from Iran. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia has released the statement.

As the statement reads, the Government of Georgia is in constant contact with the World Health Organization and the international community to obtain information on the extent of the spread of the novel virus (*1TV, February 23, 2020*).

27. Four Iranian citizens in Georgia test negative for coronavirus

Four Iranian citizens in Georgia test negative for the novel coronavirus, the head of the Infectious Diseases Hospital Tengiz Tsertsvadze, said.

He noted that their health condition is satisfactory and patients will be discharged from the hospital later on today (*1TV, February 23, 2020*).

28. Ambassador Degnan meets with NDI President Mitchell

The new Ambassador of the US to Georgia, Kelly Degnan met with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) President Derek Mitchell, during his visit to Georgia, to discuss the current political and pre-electoral environment, U.S. Embassy in Georgia reports.

“NDI plays a critical role as a non-partisan organization working with a range of partners to support democratic institutions worldwide. In Georgia, the U.S. Government proudly partners with NDI to help build and strengthen democratic institutions that are responsive to the needs of the Georgian people,” the Embassy’s statement reads (*1TV, February 23, 2020*).

29. FT - Georgia seeks more western military support to counter Russia threat

“Georgia seeks more western military support to counter Russia threat,” the Financial Times (FT) published the article under this title.

The authors built the article around Georgian Foreign Minister’s statements regarding “Russia’s growing strategic control of the Black Sea region.” As FT believes, by this statement, Georgian FM accentuated Western powers’ urgent involvement in this process to increase military investment to fight against Russia.

FT claims that Georgian Minister's "feedback spotlights the rising battle for an energy-rich commerce route that counts two EU members on its shores and hyperlinks Europe to Asia and the Mediterranean finish of the Center East." – reads the [article](#) (*FT.COM, February 23, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

30. Giorgi Kvirikashvili: I welcome Giorgi Margvelashvili's return to active politics

"I am not going to return to active politics. I will have my public position on many issues, but I am not going to return to politics because of one simple reason, I was the Prime Minister and made many decisions, guided by the interests of the country. I don't want to call into question the motivation that I had with regard to Anaklia port, I supported this project and consider it the most important for Georgia in terms of Georgia's economic and strategic positioning, " – Kvirikashvili said (*1TV, February 20, 2020*).

31. Vano Merabishvili - I guarantee that this government will come to an end in a year

"I would like to thank my supporters gathered here or those who are afar and show their support. Thanks to this support and hope, I have retained strength, energy, hope and faith to keep fighting in order to remove this regime during this year. I guarantee that this government will come to an end in a year" – he said.

Former Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of Georgia, Vano Merabishvili, has been released from prison on February 20. Merabishvili's sentence has expired today (*1TV, February 20, 2020*).

32. Giorgi Gakharia: Georgia is a country of opportunities, not coups and overthrows

"Once again it has been confirmed that the National Movement is a past day, we should think about future, we should work to make this country not a country of challenges and overthrow, but a country of opportunities for youth. Today this person in the very first minutes of his freedom said that he would overthrow the government. He did not say he would finish or change, he said he would overthrow. Let's agree that we are oriented to the future. They've had attempts to overthrow several times, but they have never succeeded and will never succeed. Our goal is to build a strong a country of opportunities, not a country of coups and overthrows," – Prime Minister said (*1TV, February 20, 2020*).

33. Anna Fotyga: I admire Vano Merabishvili's personal integrity, in so difficult circumstances he was able to deepen his knowledge

Member of the European Parliament Anna Fotyga responds to Vano Merabishvili's release from prison on the social network.

"Visiting Vano Merabishvili in prison was a very important experience for me. I admire his personal integrity. In so difficult circumstances he was able to deepen his knowledge, political expertise and both physical and mental strength. I welcome PM Merabisvili back in freedom", – Anna Fotyga wrote on her twitter page (*1TV, February 20, 2020*).

34. Minister of Internal Affairs describes Merabishvili's remark on overthrowing government as 'not serious'

"Vano Merabishvili has served his prison term, sentenced by the democratic court of our country. I will not comment on his remarks, since the representatives of the authorities have already made statements in this regard," Gomelauri said (*1TV, February 21, 2020*).

35. PM – Kutaisi will soon have a large educational center the importance of which is much more than of parliament building

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia has confirmed the information that the parliament building located in Kutaisi city will be sold.

Gakharia responded to the question of journalists that Kutaisi would be deprived the chance of development with the decision.

“Kutaisi will soon have a large educational center the importance of which will much more than of the parliament building,” PM claimed.

Also, according to Prime Minister, the parliament building in Kutaisi will acquire a new function of more economic attraction. “What can be the future of Kutaisi? Education, medicine, logistics, transport and many other things rather than only parliament,” Gakharia said (1TV, February 21, 2020).






36. "Wait for Spring" - Georgian PM on Cabinet reshuffle








“Wait for Spring. It will come soon” Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia responded to a question about Cabinet reshuffle. Giorgi Gakharia did not make further comment on this issue with the media (1TV, February 23, 2020).

Additional Information

February 24, 2020
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.8299 GEL	1 GBP - 3.6537 GEL	100 RUB - 4.3980 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0571 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4633 GEL	100 JPY - 2.5312 GEL

Monday 24 February	Tuesday 25 February	Wednesday 26 February	Thursday 27 February	Friday 28 February
				
4° 14°	-1° 8°	0° 10°	3° 15°	4° 17°

-  [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](#)