

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

February 27-March 1

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1.

❖ Tskhinvali Region (*so called South Ossetia*)

2. Fearing Coronavirus, Tskhinvali Closes All Crossing Points

Anatoly Bibilov, Moscow-backed leader of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia announced on February 27 that all crossing points connecting the region to Georgia proper will be closed to prevent the novel coronavirus from spreading.

Bibilov made the announcement at a "security council" meeting, a day after Tbilisi confirmed the first case of the COVID-19 virus in the country.

"The virus is being spread throughout the world; now it has reached neighboring Georgia. This is a serious challenge for South Ossetia, and the reaction should be rapid, but, at the same time, balanced and to the point," Bibilov stated (*Civil.ge, February 27, 2020*).

3. Tskhinvali occupation regime releases illegally detained Georgian citizen

A Georgian citizen, Eldar Gundishvili, 70, arrested by Russian troops near occupied Tskhinvali, has been released. State Security Service confirmed the information.

Eldar Gundishvili will be interrogated at the Shida Kartli Police Department and later he will be able to join his family (*1TV, February 28, 2020*).

4. State Security Service denies reports about installation of wires between Ergneti and Mamisantubani

The State Security Service explains that the aforementioned green fence was erected illegally in 2012, and the illegal installation of the barbed wire was carried out by the occupation forces in 2019.

"The central government has an irreconcilable position with regard to illegal so-called borderization. The State Security Service activates the hotline and informs the EUMM about each illegal incident. So-called borderization is one of the key issues on the agenda, both at IPRM and at the Geneva International Discussions", – Security Service said (*1TV, March 1, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

5. Georgian Defense Minister on Official Visit to Armenia

Georgian delegation headed by Defense Minister Irakli Garibashvili is visiting neighboring Armenia on February 27-28.

Defense Minister held talks with his Armenian counterpart Davit Tonoyan discussing regional security and stability. The Ministers signed a bilateral cooperation plan envisaging deepening ties between the two Ministries. Georgian delegation then visited the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial to pay tribute to the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide, Armenian Ministry of Defense wrote (*Civil.ge, February 27, 2020*).

6. Minister Tsulukiani: Russia's Obligation to Pay Compensation to Expelled Georgians 'Unconditional'

On February 28, Georgian Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani made remarks about Russia's delay to pay due compensation to Georgian victims who had suffered from illegal detention and collective expulsion by Russian authorities in 2006. Tsulukiani insisted that Russia has an obligation to comply with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgement. "Russia's sole argument not to pay EUR 10 million compensation to Georgian state is unfounded," stated the Minister, adding that Georgia has provided all requisite documentation with regard to case victims (*Civil.ge, February 28, 2020*).

7. President of Georgia welcomes peace deal signed between Taliban and US

President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili has welcomed signing of a peace deal between Afghanistan's Taliban and the US.

"Georgia, as the oldest and biggest contributor to the peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan, welcomes steps taken to the long-term peace," President wrote on Twitter (*1TV, February 29, 2020*).

8. Giorgi Gakharia: Trump's peace plan will bring real progress toward ending the war in Afghanistan

"Today marks an important moment. President Trump's peace plan will bring real progress toward ending the war in Afghanistan. Georgia will continue to stand with the US to see the agreement's conditions are met", – Giorgi Gakharia tweeted (*1TV, March 1, 2020*).

9. Pentagon signs contract for Javelin production for Georgia

The United States Department of Defense has signed a new contract for the production of Javelin anti-tank missile systems for partner countries, including Georgia and Ukraine. The relevant information has been published on the website of the U.S. Department of Defense. The total cost of the contract exceeds \$18 million.

"Raytheon/Lockheed Martin Javelin JV, Tucson, Arizona, was awarded an \$18,431,215 modification (P00022) to contract W31P4Q-19-C-0059. Work will be performed in Tucson, Arizona, with an estimated completion date of June 25, 2020.

Fiscal 2020 operations and maintenance, Army, and foreign military sales (Australia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Indonesia, Ireland, Jordan, Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Qatar, Turkey, Ukraine and United Arab Emirates) funds in the amount of \$18,431,215 were obligated at the time of the award.", – the statement reads.

Georgia received the Javelin anti-tank systems from the United States in January 2018 (*1TV, March 1, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

10. Georgian Dream, Opposition Resume Electoral Reform Talks, Albeit Informally

Following the U.S. Embassy to Georgia, on February 27, the EU Delegation to Georgia hosted ruling Georgian Dream party and the opposition representatives at an informal meeting aimed to reach consensus over electoral system reform.

This is the second attempt by the ruling party and the opposition to get back to negotiating table after the latter quit foreign-mediated official electoral reform talks in response to imprisonment of Gigi Ugulava, one of the leaders of opposition European Georgia party on February 10.

The ruling party members said, however, that no concrete figures were discussed at the today's meeting. Ex-speaker Irakli Kobakhidze, Georgian Dream's executive secretary, noted that the meeting did not aim at negotiating on the electoral system. He denied Giorgi Vashadze's remarks about 110/40 principle.

"We discussed various issues, including electoral reform and, naturally, since it was not the format of negotiations, we did not put forward [an idea] that opposition [reacted to] or vice versa ... Meetings in this [unofficial] format will promote reaching an eventual agreement on electoral system," he told reporters.

"[This meeting] is a step forward in order to hold another meeting and agree on key issues during the next [phase of] dialogic. We, as the government, will do our utmost to agree on fair [electoral] principles," Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze said after the meeting (*Civil.ge, February 27, 2020*).

11. Mdinardze: Georgian Dream agrees on 40% support amendment

Leader of the Parliamentary Majority, Mamuka Mdinardze explained that Georgian Dream agrees on the proposed amendment according to which Party with less than 40% support cannot nominate the cabinet of the ministers.

According to Mdinardze, he did not attend the meeting with the EU Ambassador, but is aware of the content of the meeting. According to him they did not talk about the allocation of the seats whether it is 110/40 or 100/50. "We agree on the proposal according to which party that wins elections with less than 40% support will not be able to nominate Prime Minister or the Cabinet of the Minister. Now it is up to opposition to agree on other principles as well," – said Mdinardze (*Netgazeti.ge, February 27, 2020*).

12. Archil Talakvadze: Georgian Dream will be presented by a renewed team and strong program in 2020 elections

"My dear fellow citizens, I would like to tell you that we respect your choice, we trust in your decision, we plan to win the 2020 elections. Definitely, the Georgian Dream will be represented by a renewed team and a very strong program. Whatever decision our citizens make, it will be unconditionally acceptable to us, " – Archil Talakvadze said after the parliamentary majority sitting on the electoral system (*1TV, March 1, 2020*).

13. German Ambassador: I am very hopeful and optimistic that we will achieve agreement on electoral system in a few days

"We had a very fruitful meeting with the political parties on Friday. We have been working for an agreement on the electoral system for the past three months. We are very close to an agreement. Just a small part remains unresolved.

"I am very hopeful and optimistic that we will achieve results on the electoral system in a few days", – Ambassador stated while commenting about the negotiations on electoral changes. Ambassador attended the Award Ceremony of winners of the German National Olympiad at the Goethe Institute in Georgia (*1TV, March 1, 2020*).

14. Investigation Launched into Physical Assault against Opposition Activist

The Ministry of Internal Affairs announced on February 28 that it has launched investigation into physical assault against Zviad Kuprava, an opposition activist, who runs the Law Enforcement Reform Center – a United National Movement-affiliated rights group.

The investigation has been launched under article 126 of the criminal code of Georgia, involving violence.

The news about Kuprava's beating emerged after Giorgi Kapanadze, founder of an online media outlet *presa.ge*, wrote about the incident on his Facebook page on February 27, simultaneously uploading Kuprava's photo.

"He came to my office shortly before the incident to discuss one of the scandalous issues related to the Deputy Interior Minister. Moreover, a rally was being planned outside Bidzina Ivanishvili's residential house tomorrow, where the glass flask [of Ivanishvili's private hilltop residence in downtown Tbilisi – editorial note] should have been declared as a quarantine station and the usurper – as the main coronavirus," he wrote, laying full responsibility on Georgian Dream leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili (*Civil.ge, February 28, 2020*).

15. Georgia Confirms Second Coronavirus Case

Amiran Gamkrelidze, Director General of the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health, confirmed on February 28 the second case of coronavirus in Georgia.

Gamkrelidze said the second case was confirmed late-night yesterday. The second Georgian national, woman, 31, who tested positive on the virus, returned to Georgia from Italy. The patient's health condition is satisfactory, said Georgia's health official. Gamkrelidze also noted that as of February 28, 87 persons are in quarantine in Georgia (*Civil.ge, February 28, 2020*).

16. Georgia Confirms Third Case of Coronavirus

Amiran Gamkrelidze, Director General of the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health announced on February 29 that the third coronavirus (COVID-19) case was confirmed in Georgia.

The patient, a young man, Georgian citizen, returned to Georgia from Iran via Azerbaijan on February 28. As he was found to have a temperature on the border, the patient was soon hospitalized to Tbilisi's Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center.

Gamkrelidze said that before arriving to Georgia from Iran the young man stayed in Azerbaijan for few days. He added that the patient in Iran had contact with the first Georgian citizen who tested positive on the virus (*Civil.ge, February 28, 2020*).

17. Republican Hospital to be declared as quarantine zone

The Tbilisi Republican Hospital will be declared as a quarantine zone regarding the novel coronavirus cases reported in Georgia – Levan Gopodze, Director of Republic Hospital said.

"All persons, who may have the virus, will be placed here. They will be under observation. Analysis will be taken and their management will be carried out as epidemic situation further requires," Gopodze said (*1TV, February 28, 2020*).

18. Tbilisi Minibus Company to disinfect its minibuses

The Tbilisi Minibus Company is launching additional security measures under the instruction of the Tbilisi City Hal in connection with novel coronavirus.

According to the company, after several cases of coronavirus have been reported in Georgia, Tbilisi Minibus made the decision to take additional measures to protect safety and begin disinfection of the company vehicles (*1TV, February 29, 2020*).

19. According to the Ministry of Health, 41 people are placed at Hospitals of Infectious Diseases, 117 - in quarantine areas

According to the Ministry of Health of Georgia, 41 people are placed at the hospitals of infectious diseases across the country (three confirmed cases), 117 are in quarantine areas in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Georgia.

As Amiran Gogitidze, Head of Call Management Department at Emergency Situations Coordination and Urgent Assistance Center reports 85 people left medical facilities and the part of them continue to stay in self-isolation (*1TV, March 1, 2020*).

20. 19 patients stay at isolated blocks of Tbilisi Hospital of Infectious Diseases

At present 19 patients stay in isolated blocks of Tbilisi Hospital of Infectious Diseases and their health condition is satisfactory, – Marina Endeladze, doctor of Hospital told reporters.

She said that there were 30 patients at the hospital, however, 14 patients tested negative on novel coronavirus.

"At present 19 patients stay in isolated blocks of Tbilisi Hospital of Infectious Diseases and their health condition is satisfactory. We expect results of tests of other 8 patients", – the doctor said (*1TV, March 1, 2020*).

21. Borjomi Mayor, Sakrebulo Chairman Arrested on Corruption Charges

The Anti-Corruption Agency of the Georgian State Security Service has arrested Levan Lipartia and Giorgi Gogichaishvili, Borjomi Municipality Mayor and Chairman of Borjomi Municipality Assembly (Sakrebulo), respectively, on corruption charges. According to the State Security Service, the third person has also been arrested on charges of "failure to report particularly serious crime."

In a statement released on February 29, the State Security Service noted that the chairman of Borjomi Municipality Sakrebulo demanded a GEL 200,000 (approximately USD 71,700) bribe from an entrepreneur in exchange for submitting the Development Regulation Plan to the Sakrebulo session and issuing a construction permit. According to the State Security Service, the Sakrebulo chairman requested GEL 20,000 (approximately USD 7,200) in advance and was caught red-handed (*Civil.ge, February 29, 2020*).

22. Adjara TV Journalists Protest Dismissal of Key Newsroom Figures

Dozens of employees of Adjara TV and Radio Company, Batumi based public broadcaster, held a silent protest on February 28 in the channel's newsroom to express their protest against the new

management's interference in the broadcaster's editorial policy. "There is State Security Service in Adjara TV," read the posters of journalists, protesting in silence.

"We have been reiterating for several months that there is an open storm against the broadcaster's [independent] editorial policy. People [employees of the TV] are being persecuted in various forms, blackmailed and dismissed from jobs," said Teona Bakuridze, anchor of the main news program.

"The broadcaster's director and three members of the Board of Advisers from Georgian Dream [ruling party] are involved in it," she added (*Civil.ge, February 29, 2020*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

23. Geostat: GDP Growth 5.1% in January

Georgia's real GDP grew by 5.1% year-on-year in January, according to preliminary data released by the National Statistics Office (Geostat) on February 28.

According to the report, real growth was registered in the following sectors: transport and storage; construction; real estate; accommodation and food service; wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; information and communication; electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; manufacturing (*Civil.ge, February 27, 2020*).

Additional Information

March 2, 2020
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.7905 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5975 GEL	100 RUB - 4.5667 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0782 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4485 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4305 GEL

Monday 2 March	Tuesday 3 March	Wednesday 4 March	Thursday 5 March	Friday 6 March
 2° 10°	 3° 16°	 4° 17°	 5° 17°	 6° 16°

-  **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](#)**