

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

February 24-26

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. **Occupied Abkhazia introduces travel restrictions for citizens of all countries, except Russia, until April 7**

The so-called government of occupied Abkhazia announced about the tightening of sanitary control on the Enguri River as a precautionary measure against the spread of the coronavirus.

Residents of occupied Abkhazia were warned to refrain from travelling "abroad." Valery Bganba, the so-called acting President of Russian-occupied region has made this statement.

In addition, the citizens of all countries, except Russia, are restricted to enter the territory of occupied Abkhazia until April 7 (*1TV, February 25, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. **Georgia deserves membership in NATO**

"Russia's seizure of Crimea from Ukraine intensified this pressure. Before this, in 2008, it occupied approximately 20 percent of Georgia's territory, including Georgia's critically strategic coastal territory of Abkhazia. Russian illegal occupation of our land remains to this day. Russia's efforts to destabilize the Balkans, especially the Black Sea countries, are well documented. Russia need not occupy these NATO members to advance its Black Sea strategies.

Three NATO members border the Black Sea: Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey; and an associate member of NATO, Georgia. Geo-political security in the Black Sea is a challenge that cannot be solved without Georgia's support. Georgia's geography, its defense and security attachments, and its proven commitment to Western and trans-Atlantic objectives make it an essential pillar of emerging strategies for NATO cooperation" – reads the [article](#) of Gakharia (*Washington Times, February 24, 2020*).

3. **US military vessel USS Ross entered the Black Sea**

The US military vessel USS Ross entered the Black Sea. According to a statement published on the website of the US Navy, the military vessel will take part in maritime security operations to enhance regional maritime stability, combined readiness, and naval capability with NATO allies and partners in the region.

"The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ross (DDG 71) began its north-bound international strait transit en route to the Black Sea Feb. 23, 2020, to conduct maritime security operations and enhance regional maritime stability, combined readiness, and naval capability with our NATO allies and partners in the region", – the statement reads (*1TV, February 24, 2020*).

4. **Giorgi Gakharia and NDI President Discuss Need of Coordinated Cooperation During Election Year**

Various directions of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Georgia have been discussed by Giorgi Gakharia, Prime Minister of Georgia and Derek Mitchell, President of NDI at a meeting held in the Government Administration of Georgia today.

According to the Prime Minister's press office, high level strategic partnership between the USA and Georgia was particularly noted at the meeting. Focus was made on the need of coordinated cooperation in the country during the election year. Timely visit of the NDI President in Georgia was underlined at the meeting, as election campaign will be entering its active phase soon.

5. Bidzina Ivanishvili met with President of NDI

Bidzina Ivanishvili, Chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia Party has met Derek Mitchell, President of National Democratic Institute (NDI) today.

The political processes and pre-election environment in the country have been discussed at a meeting held in the party's central office (*1TV, February 24, 2020*).

6. NDI President – Georgia has chance to reaffirm position as democratic leader

"As parliamentary elections approach in October, Georgia has a chance to reaffirm its position as a democratic leader in the Eurasia region," said Ambassador Derek Mitchell, President of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), at the conclusion of the visit to Georgia.

"NDI will remain steadfast in its commitment to support Georgian democracy during this critical year, and for years to come," he said (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

7. U.S. Embassy in Georgia - U.S. stands with Georgia in support of its hard-fought sovereignty and territorial integrity

The U.S. Embassy in Georgia released a statement in connection with the 99th anniversary of Day of Soviet Occupation of Georgia. On February 25 in 1921, Georgia lost its independence after the Russian Red Army took over Tbilisi.

"Today, 99 years after the Soviet occupation of Georgia began, the U.S. stands with Georgia in support of its hard-fought sovereignty and territorial integrity. The great Georgian writer Mikheil Javakhishvili described what it felt like to live in that time and we will never forget his words," reads the statement (*1TV, February 25, 2020*).

8. Toivo Klaar's mandate extended for 1 year

The Council of the European Union has extended the mandate to Toivo Klaar, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, for 1 year, until February 28, 2021.

Toivo Klaar previously served as head of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia. He was appointed as EU Special Representative first in November of 2017.

The EUMM is an unarmed civilian monitoring mission. Since October 2008, it has been supporting the stabilisation and normalisation of the situation on the ground, centred on full compliance with the six-point agreement signed by Georgia and Russia in August 2008 (*1TV, February 25, 2020*).

9. 300 Iranian citizens will leave Georgia

After the temporary suspension of air services between Iran and Georgia, one more flight will be implemented in the direction to Iran. Up to 300 Iranian citizens will leave Georgia today.

According to Tbilisi International Airport, several more flights will be carried out in order to take Iranian tourists back to their homeland.

The Georgian government decided to suspend flights to and from Iran, as a precautionary measure against the spread of the coronavirus. According to the official decision, empty planes can enter Georgia in order to take Iranian tourists back to their country (*1TV, February 25, 2020*).

10. NATO PA President: I encourage Georgia's authorities to create the conditions for a resumption of dialogue between majority and opposition

The President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) Attila Mesterházy issued the statement on recent events in Georgia.

As the statement notes, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) has recognised Georgia's aspiration to join NATO. The President of NATO PA focuses on the issue of the upcoming parliamentary elections in the country and notes that it is an opportunity for Georgia to demonstrate its commitment to NATO values (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

11. U.S. Air Force Commander - Georgia continues to be a steadfast partner and contributor to global security

"In the Caucasus, where Russian forces occupy the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia continues to be a steadfast partner and contributor to global security," U.S. Air Force Commander (EUCOM)/NATO Gen. Tod D. Wolters said in his statement on Tuesday.

General Tod D. Walters noted that "the Kremlin exerts influence over countries in the South Caucasus through manipulation of regional tensions and enduring military conflicts with all instruments of national power." (*1TV, February 26, 2020*)

12. Georgia's "Freedom Barometer 2019"

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation annually publishes a list of "Freedom Barometers" for different countries around the world. The report summarizes the indicators of countries in regard to political freedom, rule of law, and economic freedom.

This year, Georgia is in the 26th position among a list of 45 countries and scored 69.06/100. Georgia's scores improved by 4.95 points.

Georgia is ahead of all its neighbouring countries and as well as Italy, Croatia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Hungary. However, in the post-Soviet space, Georgia is behind the Baltic states.

In the category of economic freedom, Georgia holds the leading position. Moreover, the report claims, Georgia is a leader by improving the freedom of the economy (freedombarometer.org).

13. 2020 Session of the Committee of Ministers of CoE to be held in Strasbourg instead of Tbilisi

The 130th Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) will take place in Strasbourg instead of Tbilisi, Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani said at a briefing today. The decision was made at today's sitting in Strasbourg.

The Ministers' Deputies agreed to hold the 130th Session of the Committee of Ministers on 15 May 2020 in Tbilisi, in the framework of the Georgian Presidency. However, uncertainty has been raised over the possible participation of the Russian delegation, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

14. Kakha Kaladze: Country has a strong Prime Minister, no government changes is considered

Asked whether Grigol Liluashvili's candidacy for the post of PM will be considered, Kakha Kaladze answered that there was no discussion over this issue.

"The issue of government changes is not considered. The country has a strong prime minister, a government that works on a daily basis to respond to the challenges we have in the country, " – Kakha Kaladze said (*1TV, February 24, 2020*).

15. Juvenile charged for premeditated murder of Davit Saralidze sentenced to imprisonment

Mikheil Kalandia, a juvenile charged for the premeditated murder committed in a group of Davit Saralidze, youth killed at Khorava Street, was sentenced to imprisonment with a term of 11 years and 3 months.

The verdict was announced by Judge Nikoloz Marsagishvili of Tbilisi City Court. Kalandia's family members and relatives left the court hall in protest. Mikheil Kalandia was arrested on June 4 of 2019.

Two youngsters Davit Saralidze and Levan Dadunashvili were wounded in a bloody clash among school students on December 1 of 2017 at Khorava Street in Tbilisi. Dadunashvili died before delivery to a hospital. Saralidze died in hospital on December 2, 2017 (*1TV, February 25, 2020*).

16. According to survey, Georgian First Channel's news reporting is distinguished, does not incite additional negative emotions observed on other TV channels

Media Influence on the Ecology of Information Space – Presentation of the survey prepared by "Laboratory Z" of the Eastern European University has been held at the Academy of Thinking today. The study concerns the ecology of information space and its impact on human psychophysical health.

Five TV channels were analyzed throughout Georgia: TV Imedi, TV Pirveli, Rustavi 2, Main Channel, and Georgian Public Broadcaster. The survey covers the period from October 1 to November 10, 2019.

Content analysis revealed that 63 percent of the news reports were negative, 24 percent neutral, and 13 percent positive.

As the psychologist and co-author of the study Zurab Mkheidze stated at the presentation, the Georgian First Channel showed the best results in terms of the provision of information (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

17. Health Minister - The risk of coronavirus in Georgia increases

"The risk of coronavirus has increased, however, we have taken all important measures," Georgian Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze said.

As the Minister pointed out, Georgia has not confirmed the cases of coronavirus. However, the patients experiencing likely symptoms of the virus are being observed.

"The Lugar Laboratory makes a daily statement. All agencies work together. The risk of danger is certainly high. Nevertheless, we have taken all measures that significantly reduce the risk of the threat.

We have already introduced regulations that were needed for the time being. If it is necessary to tighten border control further, we are ready do to so," Tikaradze said (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

18. Georgian pharmacies running out of face masks

Pharmacies claim about the shortage of face masks as product import from China has suspended and the demand for the product has increased amid the coronavirus threat.

GPC and Aversi Pharmacies say they sell 20 pieces of masks per person. As for the prices, it has not increased and still costs 18-20 tetri.

Georgian Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze says many countries in the world are run out of masks in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. Tikaradze added that the ministry is working to restock the product (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

19. Deputy Foreign Minister – Georgian Embassies are in constant contact with Georgian citizens in countries where coronavirus is detected

The Georgian Embassies are regularly collecting the information about the condition of Georgian citizens in different countries where coronavirus is detected – Aleksandre Ghvtisiashvili, Deputy Foreign Minister said.

According to Ghvtisiashvili, Georgia's Foreign Ministry is actively involved in the work of Coordination Council set up at the order of Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia.

"The embassies are in constant contact with Georgian citizens in those countries where the state of emergency is declared. A hotline is functioning through which Georgian citizens can obtain the information and corresponding recommendations," Deputy Foreign Minister said (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

20. First case of novel coronavirus confirmed in Georgia

The first case of novel Chinese coronavirus has been confirmed in Georgia. A 50-year-old Georgian citizen, who arrived on February 25 from Iran to Georgia through Azerbaijan, tested positive on coronavirus.

Ekaterine Tikaradze, Georgian Minister of IDPs, Labor, Health and Social Affairs reported at a special briefing held at the Governmental Administration that the man was traveling on business in Iran during one week. He traveled together with a friend, and both persons were directly transferred to the hospital from Red Bridge border checkpoint.

The infected man is currently placed at an isolated bloc of the Tbilisi Hospital of Infectious Diseases. His health is said to be satisfactory (*1TV, February 25, 2020*).

21. Carl Hartzell - The window of opportunity for Georgian electoral system closes

Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia Carl Hartzell said: "the window of opportunity for the electoral system is closing."

The Ambassador noted that "there is no agreement on the date for negotiations between the ruling party and the opposition."

"There is no agreement so far. I work with all other facilitators to find common ground between all parties where this dialogue can take place.

It should be noted that the window of opportunity is closing, time is running out," Carl Hartzell stressed (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

22. Miners went on strike in Tkibuli

Miners went on strike in Tkibuli town of Imereti region. The miners protest the decision of the Administration, based on which they will have to contact Minderli Shaft when conducting coal mining, as Dzidziguri Shaft Administration will be abolished.

The miners claim that it violates safety standards as they would have to move underground through a ventilation tunnel (*1TV, February 24, 2020*).

23. Tbilisi hosts "Georgia and The World in 2020" Economic conference

Tbilisi is hosting "Georgia and The World in 2020" Economic conference opened by the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia.

The conference is organized by The Economist's annual edition "The World in 2020," and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. About 200 participants and guests are attending the event this year.

According to the conference organizers, the event aims to analyze the progress made by Georgia and to understand and discuss existing challenges and new opportunities in a global context .

24. Georgian PM - Georgia needs EU support to strengthen transport and communication links

"We have a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU. We have access to a market of high standards and all agree with our political aspirations," Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said at "Georgia and the World 2020" Economic Conference.

The head of government emphasized the importance of European counterparts' support in overcoming the challenges (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

25. Carl Hartzell – Agreement on Free Trade Areas with EU increases Georgia's Competitiveness

Carl Hartzell, EU Ambassador to Georgia talked about the importance of the agreement on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) during an economic conference "Georgia and the World 202" held in Tbilisi.

"The agreement about Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas means not only free trade. This is a project, which puts Georgia on the path to competitiveness. Much effort is needed but as soon as the country satisfies the set standards, Georgia's opportunities to global markets will be opened," EU Ambassador said (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

26. World Bank supports Georgia's Education reform

"We are extremely pleased to be able to support the Georgian Government in its extraordinary commitment to invest in the education system," said Sebastian Molineus, the World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus, at the economic conference "Georgia and the Rest of the World in 2020."

The World Bank Group and the Government of Georgia will launch the Innovation, Inclusion and Quality Project that aims to increase access to preschool education, elevate the quality of education, and create more conducive learning environments. The project aims to reach over 116,000 students countrywide (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

27. 34 IDP families receive new flats in Gori

34 internally displaced families have received new flats in Gori and Khashuri. The Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, Ekaterine Tikaradze and the State representative in Shida Kartli Giorgi Khojevanishvili gave keys to their new owners. More than 2500 families will receive new flats in 2020 (*1TV, February 26, 2020*).

❖ Sports and Culture

28. Levan Gelbakhiani receives European Shooting Stars Award

Levan Gelbakhiani, the main actor of "And Then We Danced" a film by Levan Akin, received the European Shooting Stars Award 2020 on February 24 as part of the programme to Berlin International Film Festival.

European Shooting Stars Award 2020 were welcomed to the Berlinale Palast stage by the host, Alexander Fehling – German Shooting Stars in 2011 – and presented with the European Shooting Stars Award 2020 (1TV, February 25, 2020).

29. Members of Davit Gareji Protection Committee hold protest

Members of Davit Gareji Protection Committee held a protest at Azerbaijani Embassy in Tbilisi. Protesters demanded withdrawal of Azerbaijani soldiers from the territory of Davit Gareji, a rock-hewn Georgian Orthodox monastery complex located in eastern Kakheti region of Georgia. They also left a letter addressed to President Ilham Aliyev with this demand.






Nikoloz Mzhavanadze, the protest's organizer claimed that Azerbaijani soldiers have held the monastery complex occupied for one year not allowing the believers inside the territory.








Mzhavanadze said that the agreement reached between President of Azerbaijan and Georgian Prime Minister also remained unfulfilled. The agreement envisages admission of church persons into the monastery complex (1TV, February 26, 2020).

Additional Information

February 27, 2020
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.7928 GEL	1 GBP - 3.6133 GEL	100 RUB - 4.2578 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0383 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4535 GEL	100 JPY - 2.5299 GEL

Thursday 27 February	Friday 28 February	Saturday 29 February	Sunday 1 March	Monday 2 March
 3° 14°	 4° 18°	 6° 15°	 3° 11°	 2° 11°

-  **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](#)**