

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

March 26-29

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. State of Emergency Enters into Force in Occupied Abkhazia

Due to coronavirus concerns, Valery Bganba, acting leader of Moscow-backed Abkhazia has declared a state of emergency effective from March 28 to April 20 throughout the whole territory of Abkhazia. According to Apsny Press, a local media outlet, the Abkhaz "parliament" unanimously approved Bganba's decision (*Civil.ge, March 28, 2020*).

#### 2. Rukhi General Hospital to Treat Coronavirus-Infected Patients from Occupied Abkhazia

Rukhi University Clinic, a new general-purpose hospital, will now provide medical care for coronavirus-infected patients, along with Zugdidi Hospital for Infectious Diseases, Government's administration has reported today. The 100-bed hospital, located in a few kilometers from the dividing line with occupied Abkhazia, will be equipped and fully-functional in several days' time, Health Minister has stated.

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, together with Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze and State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili, has paid a visit to the Rukhi hospital today. "We will do our utmost to protect health of our citizens on both sides of the dividing line," the Prime Minister said. According to Minister Tsikhelashvili, Rukhi Clinic will be able to diagnose infected patients and provide them with due treatment. "The hospital will receive patients from Abkhazia region as well," added Tsikhelashvili (*Civil.ge, March 28, 2020*).

#### 3. Sokhumi Closes Psou Crossing Point, Bars Foreign Nationals from Entering Occupied Abkhazia

Moscow-backed Abkhaz authorities have closed Psou crossing point, Georgia's westernmost Sokhumi-controlled border checkpoint, connecting the region to Russia, and barred "foreign nationals and stateless people" from entering Abkhazia in a bid to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus. According to local media outlet ApsnyPress, Valery Bganba, acting leader of Abkhazia, has signed a decree restricting entry for all foreign citizens except for employees of diplomatic institutions, military personnel of the Border Directorate of Russian FSB deployed in Abkhazia, servicemen of Russian military bases, and servicemen on business trips. Freight transport is also exempt from the ban (*Civil.ge, March 28, 2020*).

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

#### 4. Tskhinvali Leader Declares 'Reunification' with Russia Strategic Objective

On March 25, Moscow-backed Tskhinvali leader Anatoly Bibilov delivered a state-of-the-nation address proclaiming 'reunification' with the Russian Federation strategic goal for Tskhinvali region/South

Ossetia, local news agency RES reported. In his speech, Bibilov underlined the significance of weaving ever-closer ties with Russia, main benefactor of Tskhinvali authorities, and alluded to “looming threats” emanating from Georgia proper.

“As historical experience of our nation has attested, we can achieve our objectives only through unity with Russia. It is not only the principal precondition to advance South Ossetian statehood at this stage, but also a safeguard for the very future of our people. Reunification with Russia is the strategic goal of South Ossetia,” Bibilov stated (*Civil.ge, March 26, 2020*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### **5. Georgia Ranks Among Least Coronavirus-affected Countries in Europe**

As of March 26, Georgian health officials have diagnosed 79 cases of the novel coronavirus across the country. With a relatively low rate of infections under its belt, Georgia ranks fifth among the least coronavirus-affected countries in Europe, just after the Holy See (a single case recorded), Monaco (31), Liechtenstein (51), and Montenegro (53) (*Civil.ge, March 26, 2020*).

### **6. Georgia Cancels Contract with Chinese Company That Supplied Faulty Rapid Test Kits to Spain**

Georgian government has terminated a supply contract with Shenzhen Bioeasy Biotechnology, a Chinese biotech company that has reportedly delivered “unreliable” COVID-19 test kits to Spain. On March 23, Georgian Health Ministry signed a state procurement contract worth USD 1,182,500 with the Chinese company to purchase 200,000 rapid test kits for diagnosing novel coronavirus. First batch of the kits (3,000 pieces) was expected to arrive from China by the end of this week (*Civil.ge, March 27, 2020*).

### **7. U.S. to Provide USD 1.1 Mln Aid to Georgia to Tackle Coronavirus**

The United States will provide a financial aid worth USD 1.1 million to Georgia to help tackle the coronavirus pandemic. Funds have been earmarked to “prepare laboratory systems, activate case-finding and event-based surveillance, support technical experts for response and preparedness, bolster risk communication, and more,” the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi has written on its Facebook account today (*Civil.ge, March 28, 2020*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### **8. UNM-affiliated Organization Fined with GEL 15,000 for Defying State of Emergency Rules**

Georgian Interior Ministry has fined “New Leaders Initiative” with GEL 15,000 for violating the state of emergency, which prohibits gathering of more than ten people in public places to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

According to the Interior Ministry, the foregoing organization has been distributing personal protective equipment (masks, gloves and etc.) – donated by former President Mikheil Saakashvili’s library – earlier today in Zugdidi, western Georgia, which prompted gathering of more than 100 people in public place (*Civil.ge, March 26, 2020*).

### **9. Councils of National Minorities and Religions, Ombudsperson, Concerned over Xenophobia towards Ethnic Azeris in Quarantined Marneuli, Bolnisi**

The Georgian Public Defender and the Councils of National Minorities and Religions released a statement on March 26 in support of the quarantined residents of Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities. The Councils, run by Tolerance Center under auspices of the Public Defender, together with the Ombudsperson expressed their concern about the “xenophobic attitude” towards ethnic Azeri citizens following the lockdown of Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities due to the occurrence of community transmission of COVID-19 (*Civil.ge, March 27, 2020*).

#### **10. NCDC Director: “Very High Probability” of Community Transmission in Georgia**

There is a very high probability that Georgia has entered the stage of community transmission, Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC), has told Georgian Public Broadcaster. According to Gamkrelidze, health officials could not directly identify sources of infection of three patients (out of 85 cases in total), and in two cases, it is “almost impossible” to track the source.

NCDC director noted that, as Easter approaches, many would be tempted to gather for public celebrations. However, he warned, people should fully observe physical (social) distancing practices and stay home when possible, as the country is “on the verge of a large-scale epidemic.” “Social distancing is our mightiest weapon against the disease,” stressed Gamkrelidze (*Civil.ge, March 28, 2020*).

#### **11. Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region Tightens Measures Aimed at Preventing Coronavirus Spread**

State Representative of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region Alexandre Motserelia has announced about tightening measures to halt spread of the COVID-19. The preventive measures, effective from March 29, include:

- halting all public transportation throughout the region;
- banning all non-essential travels;
- prohibiting travel of more than three people per car;
- requiring all passengers in cars to wear face masks;
- installing checkpoints across the municipalities;
- setting up task forces composed of policemen, army and healthcare professionals (*Civil.ge, March 28, 2020*).

#### **12. Six Ministry of Defense Employees Tested Positive for Coronavirus**

Six cleaning service employees at the Civil Office of the Ministry of Defense (MoD) have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, the Ministry has reported. According to the MoD, all six employees had been self-isolating before the infection was diagnosed.

“Stringent measures have been taken to prevent the spread of the virus. All members of the staff who had come into (direct or indirect) contact with the infected employees were put into quarantine in accordance with [public health] regulations. In particular, eight servicemen were transferred to Gori Military Hospital to undergo medical checkup procedures,” reads the statement released by the MoD. The Ministry has clarified that one of the six employees might have contracted the disease from his/her family member who had returned from Azerbaijan (*Civil.ge, March 28, 2020*).

#### **13. 125 More People Fined for Defying State of Emergency Rules**

125 people have been fined for defying state of emergency rules within the last 24 hours in Georgia. According to the Georgian Interior Ministry, 96 persons were fined for public gathering; 3 legal entities and 8 persons – for violating restrictions in the sphere of business activities; 5 persons – for transporting cross-town passengers on a minibus; 13 persons – for violating rules of quarantine and self-isolation (*Civil.ge, March 29, 2020*).

#### **14. Total number of COVID-19 cases increase to 98 in Georgia**

According to the latest statistics COVID-19 cases increase to 98 in Georgia, while number of recovered patients is 18. Approximately 5000 citizens of Georgia are quarantined and 266 are under the monitoring of doctors in the different clinics. STOPCOV fund raised more than 17 million GEL (*SopCov.ge, March 30, 2020*).

#### **15. Justice Ministry, Penitentiary Service Fined for Violation of Personal Data Protection Law**

The State Inspector's Service of Georgia has fined the Ministry of Justice and the Special Penitentiary Service, a subordinate agency of the Ministry, GEL 500 each for violating the Law on Personal Data Protection. Both state entities have to pay the fine within 30 days of receipt of notice.

The decision came after Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria appealed to the State Inspector in January 2020 to examine lawfulness of Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani's actions, as Tsulukiani had publicly disclosed video footage depicting a meeting between inmates and representatives of the Public Defender. Later the Justice Ministry's Special Penitentiary Service also released the video footage. The State Inspector's Service clarified that "the situation in the penitentiary and other circumstances depicted in the report," presented by Lomjaria at the session of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, "were a matter of public interest," since it uncovered "systemic and non-systemic shortcomings" over the course of the monitoring. Therefore, the state inspection said, it was important to disclose the incident to the public (*Civil.ge, March 28, 2020*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **16. Think Tank Says Gov't Should Step up Efforts to Shield Economy from Coronavirus Fallout**

The International School of Economics (ISET), a Tbilisi-based economic policy think-tank, has published an assessment of Georgian government's handling of the coronavirus-triggered downturn in the economy. Given the rapidly changing scope of the crisis, the government should make effective use of fiscal stimulus, and, if possible, monetary policy to help soften the economic blow delivered by the pandemic, ISET reckons.



According to ISET, under worst scenario, Georgia's real GDP growth may slow down to 0,82 % (assuming a 5 % baseline) in 2020. Weakened national currency will continue to plague the consumer market, as tourist inflows, remittances, and export – essential source of foreign currency inflow for Georgia – are all expected to plummet in the foreseeable future. "On the other hand, due to restrictions on air travel, the outflow of currency from Georgia to foreign countries will be reduced, which will have a positive effect on the exchange rate. Overall, overshooting of inflation target (annual inflation stood at 6,4% in January-February, higher than the threshold of just 3%) means that the Central Bank will be reluctant to cut its benchmark rate in a bid to "avoid provoking further currency depreciation and stoking inflationary expectation even higher." (*Civil.ge, March 27, 2020*)








## **Additional Information**

**March 30, 2020**

### **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD – 3.2896 GEL      1 GBP - 4.0330 GEL      100 RUB -4.2168 GEL  
1 EUR - 3.6232 GEL      1 TRY - 0.5096 GEL      100 JPY - 3.0260 GEL

Monday 30 March	Tuesday 31 March	Wednesday 1 April	Thursday 2 April	Friday 3 April
				
5° 13°	5° 16°	8° 16°	7° 15°	8° 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](#)**