

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

April 6-9

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Sokhumi Tightens Border Restrictions Due to Coronavirus Pandemic

Psou crossing point, Georgia's westernmost Sokhumi-controlled border checkpoint, connecting the region to the Russian Federation, will remain closed until April 20, according to a decree signed by acting Abkhaz leader Valery Bganba on April 7.

Travel restrictions apply to "all foreign nationals and stateless people" exempting only diplomatic corps (representatives of a handful of countries that recognize Abkhazia's independence from Georgia, including Russia – Civil.Ge's note), military personnel of the Border Directorate of Russian FSB deployed in Abkhazia, servicemen of Russian military bases, and freight truck drivers (*Civil.ge, April 7, 2020*).

#### 2. Abkhazia Confirms First Coronavirus Case

Moscow-backed Abkhazia has registered the first case of the novel coronavirus in the region. Abkhazia's chief sanitation officer Lyudmila Skorik noted that the infected patient has arrived in Gagra, Georgia's westernmost town, after having returned from a trip to Moscow.

After testing positive for coronavirus, the patient was delivered to Gudauta hospital, where s/he now undergoes treatment. Contact tracing is now carried out to track the spread of the disease, noted Abkhazia's health officer (*Civil.ge, April 7, 2020*).

#### 3. Abkhazia Confirms Second Coronavirus Case

Moscow-backed Abkhaz authorities confirmed the second case of the novel coronavirus in the region. The new patient had contracted the disease from Abkhazia's patient zero.

The new infected patient undergoes self-isolation, noted Abkhaz health authorities, adding that his/her medical condition remains satisfactory (*Civil.ge, April 8, 2020*).

#### 4. Nighttime Curfew Enacted in Gagra District

Acting Abkhaz leader Valery Bganba has imposed a curfew from 20:00 to 07:00 [21:00 to 08:00 GMT+4, Tbilisi time – Civil.ge's note] in occupied Gagra district, in an effort to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. According to the decree, violators will be detained until the end of the curfew. The decision about curfew came as the region confirmed its first novel coronavirus case in Gagra (*Civil.ge, April 8, 2020*).

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

#### 5. Tskhinvali Announces Paid Non-Working Period Until April 30 Due to Coronavirus Concerns

Anatoly Bibilov, Moscow-Backed leader of occupied Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, has declared a paid non-working period from April 8 to April 20 in a bid to stem the spread of COVID-19, "RES", a local news agency has reported. As stated in Bibilov's decree, all employees, except for those providing essential and emergency services – including pharmacies, grocery stores, banks and others – will enjoy two-week paid holidays throughout the occupied region (*Civil.ge, April 7, 2020*).

#### **6. Tskhinvali KGB 'Wary' of Georgia's Offer to Provide Humanitarian Assistance to Tackle Pandemic**

KGB of Moscow-backed Tskhinvali has expressed "concerns" over Georgian authorities' pledge to provide assistance to citizens residing in the occupied regions amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Georgia's expressed will to deliver humanitarian aid is aimed at securing an emergency package worth EUR 1 billion from the EBRD and other international organizations such as UNDP, and USAID, KGB has asserted.

Kremlin-backed region's authorities noted that, at the time of the outbreak, "the main external security threat" was stemming from Georgia proper. "In the light of these developments," KGB decided to close Odzisi-Mosabruni [Razdakhan] crossing point which has been temporarily open since March 2 to allow residents, left in Georgia proper after the closure of all functioning crossing points, return to the region. All other crossing point have been shut down by Tskhinvali authorities since February 27 in an effort to "stop the spread of the virus." (*Civil.ge, April 7, 2020*)

### **❖ Foreign Affairs**

#### **7. Georgian PM, EU Neighbourhood Commissioner Hold Video Talk**

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia held video talk with Olivér Várhelyi, the European Union Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement.

"Spoke to Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia to confirm that the EU continues stand by partners in fight against the coronavirus outbreak, as part of our global response to the pandemic," Olivér Várhelyi wrote on Twitter (*Civil.ge, April 7, 2020*).

#### **8. Five NATO Ships Make Port Call in Georgia**

Five NATO ships, assigned to the Standing NATO Maritime Group Two (SNMG2), are visiting the Georgian port of Poti on April 7-9. The Standing NATO Maritime Group is hosted by the Georgian Interior Ministry's Border Police.

The maritime group, which includes the Bulgarian BGS Verni, Canadian HMCS Fredericton, Italian ITS Fasan, Romanian ROS Regina Maria and Turkish TCG Salihreis, is led by Rear Admiral Paolo Fantoni Commander of NATO's SNMG2.

According to the Georgian Interior Ministry, the SNMG2 crews will train with the Georgian Coast Guard's two U.S.-gifted Island-class patrol boats, aiming to increase interoperability between Georgia and the NATO.

"This port visit is a visible demonstration of NATO-Georgia successful cooperation in terms of the Black Sea maritime security and underlines the Alliance's continued commitment to Georgia," noted Georgian Ministry of Interior in its statement (*Civil.ge, April 8, 2020*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### **9. Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region Shuts Down Senaki, Zugdidi Bazaars**

Agrarian open-air markets have been closed down in Senaki and Zugdidi municipalities of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region in western Georgia, to halt further spread of COVID-19.

The region's state representative Alexandre Motserelia announced today that the markets failed to comply with the regulations and have been therefore temporarily closed.

According to local media, Tsnori, Kabali, Telavi and Gurjaani agrarian markets in Katheti region, eastern Georgia are also closing down. Two days ago, bazaars were closed in Shida Kartli and Imereti regions as well (*Civil.ge, April 6, 2020*).

### **10. Gov't Launches "Aggressive Testing" of Target Groups**

Health officials have started aggressive testing of target groups, such as frontline medical personnel, Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze has stated. According to the Minister, health officials are intending to gradually scale up testing. "We are not expecting sharp rise of confirmed cases in the aftermath of aggressive testing," Tikaradze noted (*Civil.ge, April 6, 2020*).

### **11. Top Health Official Entreats Georgian Orthodox Church Parishioners to Pray at Home**

Paata Imnadze, Deputy Head of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC), has called on parishioners of the Georgian Orthodox Church "to pray at home" and refrain from visiting church houses in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19. "Let us protect our mother church, protect our senior clerics, by not visiting churches and praying at home. Churches cannot close, clergymen will still pray [in churches] for us," noted Imnadze in his address to Orthodox parishioners (*Civil.ge, April 6, 2020*).

### **12. Nine More Central Bank Employees Diagnosed with Coronavirus**

Nine Employees of the National Bank of Georgia have tested positive for COVID-19, bringing the total of infected employees to 16. According to the Central Bank, newly infected employees have contracted the disease from the cluster of seven other employees diagnosed with coronavirus last week. All members of the staff who had come into contact with the infected employees were quarantined, and further epidemiological research and contract tracing are underway, the NBG said.

"National Bank of Georgia, as the principal financial institution, plays a central role in ensuring sound functioning of the financial sector and providing money supply for the economy under any circumstances," reads the statement released by the NBG today. The Central Bank pledged to carry out its functions uninterrupted despite coronavirus concerns (*Civil.ge, April 6, 2020*).

### **13. Tbilisi Bazaars Closed to Curb Spread of Coronavirus**

All agricultural open-air markets in Tbilisi have been shut down in an effort to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. "Within the framework of preventive measures against the disease, and in accordance with a recommendation by the Inter-Agency Coordination Council, all agricultural markets in Tbilisi are now closed," Tbilisi City Hall has stated (*Civil.ge, April 7, 2020*).

### **14. Patriarch Does Not Attend Annunciation Church Service In Holy Trinity Cathedral**

Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, Head of the Georgian Orthodox Church, has not attended the Annunciation service held in the Holy Trinity cathedral today. The service has instead been conducted by Metropolitan Shio Mujiri, Patriarch's locum tenens.

As stated by Tsisana Shartava, Patriarch's personal physician, Ilia II's medical health condition remains stable and he has only experienced changes of arterial blood pressure. "Due to blood pressure fluctuations, we [physicians] asked him [not to attend the Annunciation service] in order to keep him in good health for upcoming [Easter] holidays," Shartava said in a phone conversation with Formula TV, a Georgian media outlet (*Civil.ge*, April 7, 2020).

#### **15. Altar Boy of Georgian Orthodox Church Diagnosed with Coronavirus**

An altar server of the Georgian Orthodox Church, who serves at one of the churches in northeastern Tbilisi, and his two family members have tested positive for the novel coronavirus today, local media outlets have reported. It is unclear where the infected churchman had contracted the disease. According to his parish members, the altar server did attend church services on Sunday for a short time, increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission (*Civil.ge*, April 7, 2020).

#### **16. Georgia Reports Third Coronavirus Death**

Third person diagnosed with COVID-19 infection has died today, Tengiz Tsertsvadze, Head of Tbilisi Hospital for Infectious Diseases has told reporters. An 86-year-old woman had been undergoing treatment for two weeks in the said hospital. According to Tsertsvadze, the patient had underlying health conditions – a chronic neurological disease- and had developed double pneumonia, and severe sepsis, further aggravating her medical state. "Her health condition was not compatible with life," noted Georgia's chief COVID-19 physician (*Civil.ge*, April 7, 2020).

#### **17. Additional Thermal Screening Checkpoints to be Set Up in Vani Municipality**

Additional thermal checkpoints will be set up in Vani Municipality in western Georgia's Imereti region to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, Irakli Chikovani, Prime Minister's spokesperson made the announcement after the ad hoc task force meeting today. According to Chikovani, the decision follows the new COVID-19 case in the municipality (*Civil.ge*, April 8, 2020).

#### **18. Locally Manufactured Face Masks Available at Pharmacies**

Georgian Economy Minister Natia Turnava announced today that 400,000 locally manufactured multiple use face masks are already on sale at large pharmacies: Aversi, PSP, Pharmadepot and GPC. According to Turnava, the face masks will cost 0.5 GEL (*Civil.ge*, April 8, 2020).

#### **19. Health Minister Speaks of Allocating Additional Hospital Beds**

Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze stated that 3,500 hospital beds have been allocated for treating coronavirus-infected patients throughout the country. She said there is also space available for additional 10,000 patients who do not need to be placed at hospitals but rather be kept in quarantine (*Civil.ge*, April 8, 2020).

#### **20. President Will NOT Attend Easter Liturgy**

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili stated in a video address today that she cannot attend Easter Vigil on April 19 because a President cannot violate the state of emergency regulations. Zurbishvili said, as a President she should be exemplary for other citizens, therefore, she cannot give them an example of disobedience.

Earlier, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia and other members of his cabinet, also announced that this year they will follow the Easter Liturgy on TV from home due to the novel coronavirus pandemic (*Civil.ge, April 9, 2020*).

#### **21. Number of positive coronavirus cases increased to 227**

According to the latest information, by April 10 number of infected with coronavirus increased to 227, 52 recovered and 3 passed away (*Stopcov.ge, April 10, 2020*).

#### **22. President Zurabishvili Pardons Nine Inmates**

On April 7, Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili has pardoned nine female inmates on the day of Annunciation.

According to the President's press office, all of the pardoned convicts are mothers of at least one minor, and none of them have been convicted for violent crimes (*Civil.ge, April 7, 2020*).

#### **23. Mayor of Kutaisi Resigns, Quits Politics**

Giorgi Chigvaria, Mayor of Kutaisi, the country's second largest city, has announced about his decision to resign and quit politics.

In his Facebook post published on April 8, Chigvaria noted that "a lot of important projects" were implemented in Kutaisi under his tenure. "Many of them have not been suspended even in this difficult situation," he added.

According to the media outlets Mtavari Arkhi and TV Pirveli, the reason for the resignation was the disagreement with the central government. Rumors say that Chigvaria had failed several important projects for Georgian Dream and it was planned to release him from the duties for a long time but they did not want to demonstrate that this decision was made after the pressure of the opposition.

Chigvaria was elected on the post of Mayor of Kutaisi by direct elections in 2017 (*Civil.ge, TV Pirveli, Mtavari Arkhi*).

### **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **24. EBRD Pledges Financial Support to Georgia to Mitigate Coronavirus Fallout**

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), a London-based international financial institution, has announced about stepping up cooperation with Georgia as the country continues to tackle negative economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The EBRD has allocated funds worth EUR 1 billion through the emergency Solidarity Package to assist its clients across 38 economies, including in Georgia (*Civil.ge, April 6, 2020*).

#### **25. EU Allocates EUR 183 Mln to Support Georgia's Needs amid Pandemic**

The European Commission will allocate over EUR 183 million of funds for Georgia as part of its global response to the coronavirus outbreak.

The support is part of the European Commission's "emergency support package" for the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries – Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine.

On April 8, the European Union Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi stated that "regional and bilateral funds are being redirected as part of Team Europe response,

amounting to EUR 962 million,” earmarked to address immediate needs and mitigate socio-economic impact (*Civil.ge*, April 8, 2020).

## 26. Int’l Organizations Pledge Funds to Help Georgia Tackle Coronavirus Fallout

A group of international partners, including the EU, the IMF, the World Bank, and other prominent financial institutions, have published an [open letter](#) pledging financial relief package for Georgia to help with economic assistance and recovery amid the coronavirus pandemic and “associated economic crisis.”

### **Additional Information**

**April 10, 2020**

**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 3.1794 GEL	1 GBP - 3.9227 GEL	100 RUB - 4.2035 GEL
1 EUR - 3.4576 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4697 GEL	100 JPY - 2.9222 GEL

Friday 10 April	Saturday 11 April	Sunday 12 April	Monday 13 April	Tuesday 14 April
				
4° 15°	4° 14°	3° 12°	3° 11°	5° 14°

-  **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](#)**