

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

April 21-22

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Date: **April 23, 2020**

## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. De-facto Abkhazia Ends State of Emergency

Raul Lolua, the so-called head of the local operative headquarters, said curfew has been lifted and the ban on entry into the Gagra and Gali districts has been eased. Educational institutions and public catering services are still closed and no tourist facilities have been reopened as yet.

Lolua stated that the situation in the self-proclaimed "republic" is under control. Surprisingly, and probably due to the lack of medical equipment, no new cases of coronavirus have been reported from the region (*georgiatoday.ge*, April 22, 2020).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

#### 2. Georgia in RSF Press Freedom Index 2020

Press freedom has slightly improved in Georgia, yet the country's position remained unchanged in the [ranking](#) by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) released on April 21.

Georgia, according to the survey, is ranked 60th in the table of 180 countries with 28.59 points. Last year, Georgia had 28.98 points.

"Georgia's media are pluralist but still very polarized," RSF highlighted.

According to Paris-based watchdog, "the reforms of recent years [in Georgia] have brought improvements in media ownership transparency and satellite TV pluralism, but owners still often call the shots on editorial content."

RSF referred to developments around Rustavi 2 TV in 2019. "In compliance with a European Court of Human Rights ruling, Rustavi 2, the main national opposition TV channel, was restored to a previous owner, resulting in its adoption of a pro-government editorial policy and in the resignation of most of its journalists," said RSF, adding that "two new pro-opposition TV channels emerged as a consequence of the conflict."

"Adjara TV, a regional public television channel, has meanwhile suffered from repeated pressure to support a particular party," the watchdog emphasized. (*Civil.ge*, April 21, 2020).

#### 3. Russia Mulls Resuming Direct Flights to and from Georgia

Russia is considering reversing the flight ban to and from Georgia in the near future, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated on April 21, according to TASS, a Russian news agency.

Lavrov also floated an idea to discuss opening trade representative offices "if Tbilisi were to put forward such a proposal," TASS reported (*Civil.ge*, April 21, 2020).

#### **4. Georgian PM, Top EU Diplomat Hold Phone Talk**

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell and Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia held phone talk on April 21, discussing the novel coronavirus outbreak, including the handling of the pandemic and its socio-economic consequences, as well as number of other issues.

In a press release of April 22, Peter Stano, the EU's Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, noted that the two leaders "expressed their mutual solidarity" and that High Representative Borrell emphasized "the EU's support to Georgia to face this crisis." (*Civil.ge, April 22, 2020*)

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **5. Georgia Extends State of Emergency until May 22**

Georgian Government's Spokesperson Irakli Chikovani announced at news briefing on April 21 that Georgia will extend state of emergency until May 22.

Georgia first announced the novel coronavirus state of emergency on March 21 effective for one month period.

Prime Minister Gakharia will now address President Zurabishvili to sign a relevant decree and proceed it to the Parliament for approval. The government also extends nationwide ban on driving private vehicles until April 27.

Spokesperson Chikovani said that Georgian Government intends to gradually lift some restrictions throughout the extended period of state of emergency.

Chikovani noted that on Friday, April 24, the government will unveil a set of anti-crisis measures that should help the country recover from pandemic lockdown. "The anti-crisis plan will be comprised of two stages," noted Chikovani, adding that it will include steps for targeted social assistance, as well as measures to help businesses recover from the crisis.

In addition, on April 24, the government will uncover the plan to gradually re-open the economy, stated Chikovani (*Civil.ge, April 21, 2020*).

#### **6. President Zurabishvili Signs the Decree, Extends Emergency until May 22**

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili addressed the nation on the state of emergency. The President signed the decree, extending nationwide coronavirus emergency until May 22 (*Civil.ge, April 21, 2020*).

#### **7. Parliament Authorizes to Extend State of Emergency**

The Georgian Parliament confirmed the presidential order at an emergency sitting with 97 MPs voting in favor and ten against, clearing the way for extending a nationwide state of emergency effective until May 22 (*Civil.ge, April 22, 2020*).

#### **8. Several Municipalities Ease Restrictions on Driving to Allow 'Essential' Agricultural Work**

From 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. and from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., driving private vehicles will be allowed in order to carry out "essential" agricultural work in several Georgian municipalities, including Telavi, Sagarejo, Gurjaani, Akhmeta, Dedoplistskaro, Kvareli, Sighnaghi, and Kaspi. The measure is effective from April 22 until April 27, when the nationwide driving ban is set to expire.

"While travelling by car, all passengers must observe the Health Ministry recommendations (no more than 3 persons allowed in a single vehicle, all passengers must be wearing face masks)," City Halls of the said municipalities have stated (*Civil.ge, April 21, 2020*).

#### **9. Georgia Reports Fifth Coronavirus Death**

Georgia has confirmed the fifth coronavirus death. The patient, an 68-year-old man, who had been undergoing treatment for two weeks, died at the First University Clinic in Tbilisi.

Lali Turdzeladze, representative of the hospital told journalists at a news briefing that the deceased patient had underlying health conditions, including myocardial infarction, acute double pneumonia, consequent respiratory failure, and septic shock.

According to Turdzeladze, pulmonary embolism led to the patient's death, who belonged to cluster of Bolnisi, south to capital city of Tbilisi, which has been under lockdown since March 23 (*Civil.ge, April 22, 2020*).

#### **10. Marneuli Residents Protest Quarantine Regime, Demand Help from Local Authorities to Sell Produce**

Scores of local residents took to the streets of Shulaveri, a village in Marneuli municipality, to protest a strict quarantine regime imposed by the government on March 23 and demand assistance from local authorities in vending agricultural product in other parts of the country, mainly in the capital, Radio Marneuli, a local media outlet has reported.

Previously, on April 16, EMC, a local watchdog reported that Marneuli residents were protesting "humanitarian crisis" – triggered by the imposition of strict lockdown measures – by honking horns of their vehicles at 9 pm for five minutes without leaving their houses. "Their protest was incited by the practice of selling products at below the market prices, and unjustifiable price increases in grocery stores," mentioned EMC (*Civil.ge, April 22, 2020*).

#### **11. 420 total cases of coronavirus in Georgia**

According to the official data there had been 420 positive results on coronavirus in Georgia. From this 107 recovered 5 passed away. 128 million GEL is mobilized in the StopCov Fund (*StopCov.ge*).

#### **12. Prosecutors Bring New Charges against Cop Arrested on Negligent Manslaughter**

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia has brought new charges against a police officer, who was arrested on charges of negligent manslaughter, and accused him of premeditated murder.

If the prosecution finds him guilty, the police officer will be imprisoned for a term from seven to fifteen years (*Civil.ge, April 22, 2020*).

#### **13. Media Coalition: Adjara TV Journalists Continuously Persecuted for Their Opinions**

Coalition for Media Advocacy, uniting local media watchdogs, said the employees of Adjara TV and Radio Company, Batumi-based regional broadcaster, are continuously persecuted for their opinions which differ from those of the new management.

According to the statement released by Media Coalition on April 21, Giorgi Kokhleidze, director of Adjara TV and Radio Company, temporarily suspended journalist Teona Turmanidze from anchoring "Mtavari" – the main news program of the channel (*Civil.ge, April 22, 2020*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

### 14. EU Proposes EUR 150 Mln to Georgia to Help the country Limit Economic Fallout of Pandemic

The European Commission announced that it has adopted a proposal for a EUR 3 billion macro-financial assistance (MFA) package to ten enlargement and neighborhood partners, including EUR 150 million for Georgia, to help the countries to limit the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic (*Civil.ge, April 22, 2020*).

### 15. Georgia's Foreign Trade in January-March 2020

Georgia's foreign trade turnover in the first three months of 2020 decreased by 2.7%, compared to the same period last year, reaching USD 2.8 billion, according to the preliminary figures released by the National Statistics Office, Geostat, on April 21.

Exports from Georgia decreased by 5.9% year-on-year to USD 778.2 million, and imports were down by 1.4% y/y to USD 1.995 billion in January-March, with trade gap standing at USD 1.217 billion.

Turkey remains Georgia's largest trading partner with USD 402.2 million, followed by Azerbaijan, Russia, China and the United States with USD 306.2 million, USD 301.4 million, USD 281.3 million and USD 138.6 million, respectively.

Azerbaijan tops the list of largest trading partners by exports with USD 121.9 million, followed by China, Russia, Bulgaria and Turkey with USD 99.9 million, USD 91.2 million, USD 83.5 million and USD 54 million, respectively.






Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, China and the United States are the top trading partners of Georgia in terms of imports with USD 348.3 million, USD 210.1 million, USD 184.3 million, USD 181.4 million and USD 119.8 million, respectively (*Civil.ge, April 22, 2020*).








## Additional Information

### April 23, 2020

#### OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD – 3.1749 GEL	1 GBP – 3.9204 GEL	100 RUB – 4.1542 GEL
1 EUR – 3.4502 GEL	1 TRY – 0.4549 GEL	100 JPY – 2.9490 GEL

Thursday 23 April	Friday 24 April	Saturday 25 April	Sunday 26 April	Monday 27 April
				
4° 10°	5° 8°	6° 10°	6° 18°	8° 20°

-  **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](#)**