

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

April 23-26

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. New Abkhaz Leader Aslan Bzhania Takes Office

Aslan Bzhania was sworn in as the fifth leader of Moscow-backed Abkhazia for a five-year term on Thursday, April 23, after winning repeat polls on March 22, which was called after the local court ruled to declare September 2019 'runoffs' invalid, followed by Moscow-facilitated resignation of his predecessor Raul Khajimba's amid stormy January events in Sokhumi.

In his inauguration speech Bzhania spoke of strengthening Abkhaz institutions, building public confidence in the authorities, the need to defeating organized crime and corruption, and deepening ties with Russia (*Civil.ge, April 23, 2020*).

2. Former Abkhaz Leader Appointed as Government Head

Aslan Bzhania, Moscow-backed leader of Abkhazia appointed Alexander Ankvab as the head of the region's 12-member "cabinet of ministers."

Aslan Bzhania, who was sworn in as the leader on April 23, has already accepted the resignation of the entire cabinet formerly led by Valery Bganba.

Ankvab, 67, a close ally of late 'president' Sergey Bagapsh, already served as the government head of the region from February 2005 through February 2010 (*Civil.ge, April 24, 2020*).

3. EU Statement on CoE SecGen's 21st Consolidated Report on Conflict in Georgia

The European Union and its member states issued a statement on April 23 welcoming the release of the twenty-first consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia filed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (CoE), an intergovernmental human rights organization.

The EU underlined the importance of "keeping this issue [conflict in Georgia] high" on the political agenda of the CoE, and appealed to the Secretary General to draw up reports covering "the question of human rights protection in the areas affected by the conflict in Georgia."

The European Union expressed regret that "no progress had been made to implement the Deputies' [an administrative body comprised of permanent representatives of the CoE Committee of Ministers] decision on the conflict in Georgia," and called for their prompt implementation by relevant parties (*Civil.ge, April 23, 2020*).

4. Abkhazia Reports First Coronavirus Death

Abkhazia has reported the first coronavirus death. A 95-year-old patient, who was diagnosed with COVID-19 on April 11, passed away in Gudauta Hospital from the virus complications. The patient refused to be hospitalized until April 20, and only gave consent to be transferred to Gudauta Hospital as her health situation significantly deteriorated. Doctor Anzhela Archelia stated that at the time of admission to the hospital the 95-year-old patient bilateral polysegmental pneumonia, pronounced

hypertension and chronic renal failure. Despite getting all necessary medical care, "she died of complications, in particular, pulmonary embolism," added Archelia (*Civil.ge*, April 26, 2020).

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

5. Occupied Tskhinvali Lifts Some Restrictions

Moscow-backed Tskhinvali leadership has announced to lift restrictions on markets and beauty salons. However, they should provide disinfection and avoid mass gatherings. Meanwhile, restaurants, cafes, pools and entertainment centers remain closed (*Civil.ge*, April 24, 2020).

6.

❖ **Foreign Affairs**

7. Georgian Opposition Addresses Int'l Community over Electoral Reform Deal Implementation

Georgian opposition parties released a joint letter addressed to "partners and supporters of Georgia" on April 23, updating them on the implementation of foreign-mediated March 8 electoral reform deal between ruling party and the opposition.

Stressing that "release of political prisoners was an integral part of that agreement," opposition parties said Irakli Okruashvili's jailing for five years is "a step in the negative direction in breach of the Agreement's letter and spirit."

"On April 14, the United States Embassy as well as HE Carl Hartzell, EU Ambassador to Georgia made statement in which they expressed concern over the sentencing and called for the full implementation of the Agreement," opposition parties added (*Civil.ge*, April 23, 2020).

8. Georgia Extradites Three Inmates to Russia

The Ministry of Justice noted that Russian citizen Maxim Fateev has been charged by Russia with purchasing and keeping large amount of narcotic drugs. It said that the Russian Federation demanded Fateev's extradition in August 2019, adding that the latter had an opportunity to use all legal means envisaged by Georgian legislation and international law. On March 10, 2020, the Tbilisi City Court found Fateev's extradition to Russia admissible and rejected his request for granting him a refugee status. The Justice Ministry said that Fateev's extradition was carried through the observance of Georgian legislation and international law.

Another extradited inmate is Russian citizen, Kurban Omarov, who, according to the Georgian Justice Ministry, is accused of assisting in inflicting injuries of medium gravity committed by an organized group. The Russian Federation demanded his extradition on September 2, 2019. The Georgian Justice Ministry said that on December 25, 2019, Tbilisi City Court found Omarov's extradition admissible. The latter's defense lawyer challenged the court ruling in the Supreme Court, but the latter upheld the ruling of the previous instance. The court also rejected Omarov's request for granting a refugee status.

The third inmate extradited to the Russian Federation is Azerbaijani citizen Teimur Garibov. Russia demanded his extradition on September 2, 2019. According to the Georgian Justice Ministry, the Tbilisi City Court adopted a ruling on Garibov's extradition. Later, his defense lawyer challenged the ruling in

the Supreme Court, but the latter upheld the ruling of the previous instance that led to Garibov's extradition (*Civil.ge, April 24, 2020*).

9. Georgian Speaker Urges Ukrainian MPs not to Vote for Saakashvili as Vice-PM

On April 24, Georgian Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze addressed a letter to his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Razumkov, raising concerns over the potential appointment of former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili – a political adversary to Talakvadze's ruling Georgian Dream party – as Vice Premier of Ukraine.

Talakvadze acknowledged the "strategic partnership" and "special bonds" between the two friendly nations, while stressing, that future bilateral cooperation might be "shadowed" if Saakashvili – convicted in absentia by Georgian courts – were to be tapped for a high-ranking job in Ukraine.

"[Saakashvili] bears responsibility for systemic failures concerning human rights, misuse of power, freedom of media, interference into the property rights and jeopardizing free elections [under his watch]," Talakvadze wrote (*Civil.ge, April 24, 2020*).

10. Georgian Politicians Assess Potential Appointment of Saakashvili as Vice-PM in Ukraine

Ruling Party's Assessments

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia: "The Ukrainian people are our brotherly people. Ukraine is our strategic partner. A narrow political conjuncture cannot alter this in the long run. However, for us it is absolutely intolerable from a strategic partner [like Ukraine] to appoint a person, who is convicted and persecuted for serious crimes in Georgia, as a deputy Prime Minister... We have not yet recalled an ambassador, but if such a decision is made [to appoint Saakashvili as Vice PM] we will recall him at least for consultations."

Ex-Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze: "Saakashvili's appointment will not bear any fruits and our country, as well as Ukraine, has learned a lesson. However, that lesson does not seem to be enough [for Ukraine]. Therefore, it is our obligation, as a friend, to remind our Ukrainian friends what Saakashvili's presence in active political space meant for Georgia and what it might mean for Ukraine... From social and economic issues, and to handing over 20 percent of our territories to Russia... We have a reason for optimism that finally the Ukrainian parliament and individual lawmakers will make the right decision... This is an acid test of friendship between the two states... [If Saakashvili will become Vice PM] it will negatively affect the friendship between the two governments."

Opposition's Assessments

Former MP Nika Melia, United National Movement: "Mister Talakvadze – a Parliament Speaker in name only – is very well aware of the fact that success of the Ukrainian state, has been achieved, among others, owing to very active role played by Mikheil Saakashvili – which only benefits Georgia. He knows this, does not he? Sooner or later, he will not be occupying his chair, he may not even be in politics. What will he answer, when asked why he hindered the development of [Georgia's] partner state [Ukraine], therefore impeding Georgia on its way to progress? He would better reflect on this."

MP Giga Bokeria, European Georgia party: "This letter authored by Speaker Talakvadze, along with Ivanishvili's [chair of the ruling Georgian Dream party] team's statements, and potential steps they are considering to take, directly harm Georgia's [national] interests. Our country needs a strategic partnership with Ukraine for security, economy, everything – this is in our interest. They should not be

sacrificing national interests for the sake of their rivalry with the former President or personal animosity...[On the other hand] Neither Ivanishvili's Government, nor the opposition and, among others, ex-President, must not bring up internal matters of Ukraine for political discussion in Georgia."

Nino Burjanadze, United Georgia – Democratic Movement party: "[Saakashvili's appointment] means that our Government does not enjoy respect in the world, in particular, in Ukraine – our strategic partner state. This [Georgian Dream] Government has absolutely irrelevant visions and improper remedies for every challenge that Georgia is facing. Therefore, ruining relations with Ukraine now will have very grave and complicated [consequences]. The Government should take heed of these [consequences], and ignore that [Saakashvili's appointment] is a slap in its face."

Shalva Natelashvili, Georgian Labor Party: "It seems that they try to exert pressure on Ukrainian President in order to prevent appointment of ex-President [Saakashvili as Vice Premier of Ukraine]. I reckon that [Government's attempt] is doomed – [Georgian Dream's standing] cannot be saved neither inside our country, nor in Ukraine, Europe, or the U.S. Whether they tap Saakashvili or not for whatever is the job, [Georgian Dream] is doomed, for this is a fight against [political] phantoms." (*Summarized by civil.ge, April 25, 2020*)

❖ Internal Affairs

11. Authorities Quarantine Village Gvankiti in Imereti Region

Georgia shuts down village Gvankiti of Terjola Municipality in western Imereti Region as the authorities confirmed 10 COVID-19 cases in the settlement.

Having 10 infected patients in a single village carries great risk of [further COVID-19 transmission], State Representative in Imereti Region Zviad Shalamberidze said.

Police have set up five checkpoints at the entry/exit points of the village, according to Shalamberidze. A group of epidemiologists from the National Center for Disease Control will shortly arrive to the village to carry out thermal screenings en masse, he added.

According to 2014 Georgian Census, Gvankiti is home to 1968 people living in 555 households (*Civil.ge, April 23, 2020*).

12. Georgia to Ramp up Testing Capacity Making 100,000 PCR Kits Available by Early May

Georgia is set to increase testing capacity for diagnosing COVID-19 by stocking up on polymerase chain reaction test kits. "At this time we have up to 10,000 PCR kits available. On Monday, we will receive additional 40,000 kits, so by early May we will have 100,000 units at our disposal," Georgia's Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze has stated at a briefing of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council, a government task force.

The Health Minister also updated the public on the use of rapid testing for prompt detection of the virus. "By now, 5,000 patients have been tested using rapid test kits, and another 9,000 in stock have been dispatched to hospitals countrywide," Tikaradze noted (*Civil.ge, April 23, 2020*).

13. Georgia Toughens Penalties for Violating Emergency Laws

Individuals found guilty of repeat violation of the state of emergency or martial law regulations may face up to six years of imprisonment unless otherwise specified by the relevant presidential decree, says an amendment to the Criminal Code of Georgia, adopted by the Georgian parliament on April 23.

Fast-tracked changes were approved with 80 votes in favor to 0 against. The amended Code will come into force on May 2. The opposition did not take part in the vote.

Legal persons (businesses and organizations) violating the same may incur considerable fines, or might lose their license to, or be closed down altogether.

Repeat violation of self-isolation/quarantine regime defined by the Georgian Law on Public Health will be punishable by house arrest from six months to two years, or by up to three years in jail. These toughened sanctions will remain in force after the current emergency has been lifted. While the state of emergency continues, lighter sanctions prescribed by the presidential decree will prevail (*Civil.ge, April 24, 2020*).

14. Watchdog Slams Changes to Law Increasing Penalties for Violating Emergency Rules

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), a local watchdog, released a statement on April 24 criticizing recently adopted legislation – toughening penalties for breaking emergency laws. The statement reads that the deliberation took place through urgent procedure, without due procedure of debate, and some of its provisions are “vague” while others seem “not compliant with human rights standards established by the Constitution.” (*Civil.ge, April 25, 2020*)

15. Gov't Shuts Down Three Villages in Quarantined Bolnisi Municipality Due to Contagion Risk

Three villages – Khatisopeli, Vanati and Mushevani – have been shut down and placed under strict quarantine regime in order to stem “large-scale” spread of coronavirus, the Bolnisi Municipality City Hall has stated. Police have set up checkpoints to control road traffic, while transporting of food and medicine to the quarantine zone will carry on unhindered, noted the City Hall (*Civil.ge, April 25, 2020*).

16. Rate of Georgians Testing Positive For Coronavirus Drops, Despite Expanded Testing

Despite the recent spike in confirmed COVID-19 cases, a lower percentage of people are testing positive for coronavirus per one hundred tests conducted than earlier, Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia has stated in a TV interview.

Test-positivity rate (a metric that shows the ratio between who got tested for the virus and who tested positive for it) amounted 2 % during a large-scale testing of high-risk groups (897 tests in total) yesterday – a decrease from the average rate of all conducted tests that stands at 4,5 % (*Civil.ge, April 25, 2020*).

17. Georgia Reports Sixth Coronavirus Death

Georgia has confirmed the sixth coronavirus death. The patient, an 83-year-old man had underlying health conditions, including heart failure and arrhythmia, according to Levan Ratiani, Director of the First University Clinic in Tbilisi (*Civil.ge, April 26, 2020*).

18. Georgia Shuts Down Town of Tetrtskaro

Georgia shuts down the town of Tetrtskaro in Kvemo Kartli region, State Representative Shota Rekhviashvili told journalists. The decision comes as Georgian health authorities confirmed 12 COVID-19 cases in the town.

The first case of the novel coronavirus in Tetrtskaro was confirmed to a local hospital nurse yesterday, prompting administration to place the clinic under quarantine regime.

In addition, 7 other coronavirus cases were reported in the villages of Tetrtskaro Municipality, however, the shutdown measures will apply only to the municipal center so far.

According to 2014 Georgian Census, Tetrtskaro Municipality is home to 21,127 people, of which 3 093 inhabitants live in the town of Tetrtskaro.

Police, charged with ensuring public order and strict quarantine measures, has already set up checkpoints at the entrances of the town (*Civil.ge, April 26, 2020*).

19. Number of confirmed coronavirus cases increase to 496

In last three days after intensification of testes number of patients had been increasing by 20+ per day and achieved 496. 149 patients have been recovered and 6 deceased (*Civil.ge, April 27, 2020*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

20. Members of Investors' Council to Help Gov't Draw up New Investment Strategy

Members of the Investors' Council, an advisory body to the Prime Minister, are cooperating with the Cabinet to help develop a new investment strategy aimed at attracting new foreign direct investments (FDI), Georgian government's administration has reported.

At a video-conference today chaired by Maia Tskitishvili, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure, Council members discussed global economic trends affected by the pandemic, as well as Georgia's economic outlook and a set of measures envisaged by the government's plan to mitigate the crisis.

During the meeting, Council members highlighted the measures aimed at fostering economic recovery, and elaborated on steps necessary for promoting Georgia's place amid the competitive global market (*Agenda.ge, April 23, 2020*).

21. Prime Minister Unveils Anti-Crisis Plan to Mitigate Coronavirus Fallout

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia has presented an [anti-crisis plan](#) aimed at tackling social and economic challenges amid the coronavirus pandemic.

As stated by Gakharia, GEL 3,9 billion was allocated to finance the measures prescribed by the anti-crisis plan. A total of 350,000 citizens will benefit from the targeted assistance package (*Civil.ge, April 24, 2020*).

22. Georgian Politicians Assess Government's Anti-Crisis Plan

Archil Talakvadze, Parliament Speaker: "We have developed a plan aimed at providing social-economic support and restarting the economic activity in the country. With this plan, we are responding to the needs of each and every citizen requiring healthcare, social assistance and economic support. In particular, GEL 350 million will be spent on healthcare; GEL 35 million will be directed to the needs of citizens and GEL 2.1 billion will be allocated to support economy and business. The state will spend a total of GEL 3.5 billion to help people."

MP Salome Samadashvili, the United National Movement: "This program and its budget should have been submitted to the Parliament and then we should have had an opportunity to ask questions. I have a lot of questions concerning international aid [to finance the package], because the government failed to tell us the details about what specific assistance is forthcoming. The government did not tell us

how it plans to fill a huge budgetary gap that we will have; nor how the promises given today will be kept.”






MP Giga Bokeria, European Georgia: “The presentation we heard from [PM] Gakharia came too late, it was too superficial, full of inadequate criteria and vague overall. No taxes are cut, citizens won’t feel the alleviation of financial burden, neither will the businesspeople, which is unpardonable in the current circumstances. When it comes to direct financial assistance – it is hard to comprehend – the criteria for assigning it are incorrect, the per-person amount is insufficient and overall scheme is too small. We have heard nothing about deregulation, the large role of the government is maintained – they will decide who gets what. As if they knew better than us, how to spend our money. This increases the risk of corruption and is overall a wanton harm. Same about accumulated pension reserves – they [the government] are refusing the people to use these funds.”








Nino Burjanadze, United Georgia – Democratic Movement: “I would say that the so called plan has left a depressing impression on me, because the mentioned figures speak of an extremely grave situation [we are in]... The government openly tells our citizens that they will have to reconcile themselves with starvation. The budgetary deficit will hit GEL 3.9 billion and the government says that by tightening their belts they managed to scrape up only 300 million – this is a dismal figure. When the government says that it will help people with disabilities only with GEL 100, this is a very grave figure.”
(Civil.ge, April 24, 2020)

Additional Information

April 27, 2020
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 3.2027 GEL	1 GBP - 3.9537 GEL	100 RUB - 4.3031 GEL
1 EUR - 3.4551 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4593 GEL	100 JPY - 2.9759 GEL

Monday 27 April	Tuesday 28 April	Wednesday 29 April	Thursday 30 April	Friday 1 May
				
8° 21°	6° 17°	8° 15°	10° 20°	11° 24°

-  **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](#)**