

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

May 7-10

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Crisis Group Assesses COVID-19 Response in Abkhazia, Tskhinvali

On May 7, the International Crisis Group, a think tank, published a report assessing response to COVID-19 pandemic by Moscow-backed authorities in Georgia's occupied territories – Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

The Crisis Group argued that the pandemic posed significant threat for residents of both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region – plagued with medical supply shortages, ailing economies and international isolation. According to the Crisis Group, Abkhaz and Tskhinvali authorities – both backed by Moscow – chose to respond to the public health crisis in different ways.

Crisis Group said Tskhinvali region is "at greatest risk" in terms of tackling the pandemic. "A significant part of the population – 17 % – is elderly," it wrote, adding that "hospitals are severely under-equipped," and one of the few physicians in the region "refused" to work due to lack of basic protective equipment.

The think tank evaluated the situation in Abkhazia as "better" than in Tskhinvali region, though noted it was also at risk due to some "vulnerabilities."

"Abkhazia suffers from weak infrastructure, lacks medical professionals and has an ageing population, with nearly 20 % of residents over 60 years of age," it noted, adding that 80 % of health professionals were "themselves at high risk, in their sixties or older."

The Crisis Group cited a foreign diplomat claiming that if the region's health staff contracted the disease, Abkhazia would lose "all its doctors within days." (*Civil.ge, May 7, 2020*)

2. Abkhaz Authorities Report Four More Cases

Moscow-backed authorities of Abkhazia reported four more cases of the novel coronavirus in the region, according to Apsnypress news agency.

Abkhazia's new coronavirus patients are cadets from Russian military academies, who were undergoing quarantine in Sokhumi following their arrival to the occupied region from Russian Federation several days ago. All four patients were hospitalized, wrote Apsny Today media outlet.

According to Abkhaz task force charged with fighting the disease in the region, as of May 8, 209 persons are observing quarantine regime in Aitar Hotel in Sokhumi (*Civil.ge, May 8, 2020*).

3. Abkhazia Reports Two More Cases

Abkhazia confirms two more cases of the novel coronavirus, taking the number of total confirmed cases in the region to 9, Apsnypress news agency reported.

The Black Sea region's two new COVID-19 patients are the Abkhaz students who have recently arrived to Abkhazia from the Russian Federation, according to the report. The students were undergoing quarantine in Sokhumi since their arrival to the region. They will be transferred to Gudauta Hospital, Abkhaz health authorities noted.

Yesterday, on May 8, four other students of Russian military academies who have recently returned from Russian Federation to Abkhazia were diagnosed with COVID-19.

Prior to that, in April, Abkhaz authorities have recorded the first three cases of the novel coronavirus, of which two patients have recovered, while the third patient, born in 1925, has died of COVID-19 complications (*Civil.ge, May 9, 2020*).

4. Putin Confers One-Time Payment for Veterans in Abkhazia, Tskhinvali

On May 8, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the decree offering one-time payment of 75,000 Russian Roubles (USD 1,022) to some Russian citizens permanently residing in Georgia's Moscow-backed regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia (and Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria) in connection with 75th anniversary of the victory in "The Great Patriotic War" – the term Russia uses to denote the period of confrontation with the Axis powers following the invasion of USSR by Nazi Germany on June 22, 1941 (*Civil.ge, May 9, 2020*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

5. Tskhinvali Authorities Extend Restrictions Through May 31

Moscow-backed authorities in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia prolonged coronavirus-related restrictions, which was set to expire on May 12, through May 31. The decision comes as the number of reported cases hit 15 in the region May 7 (*Civil.ge, May 7, 2020*).

6. Tskhinvali Confirms Two More Cases, Total Reaches 17

Moscow-backed Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia authorities have reported two more COVID-19 cases in the region, taking the number of total confirmed cases to 17, according to "Res" news agency. The region's chief sanitation officer told "Res" media outlet that in total regional authorities carried out a total of 297 tests (*Civil.ge, May 9, 2020*).

7. Tskhinvali Confirms 5 New Cases, Total Reaches 22

Moscow-backed Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia authorities have confirmed five more cases of the novel coronavirus, that takes the number of total confirmed cases in the region to 22, according to RES news agency (*Civil.ge, May 10, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

8. 13 Georgian Nationals Died of Coronavirus Abroad in Total

In total, 13 Georgian citizens have died of COVID-19 complications abroad according to the data provided by Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani (*Civil.ge, May 7, 2020*).

9. Zelenskyy Appoints Former Georgian President as Chairman of Ukrainian Executive Reform Committee

On May 7, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appointed former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili as the chairman of the Executive Reform Committee, according to a decree published on Ukrainian President's website.

"I sincerely congratulate Mikheil Nikolozovich on a new responsible challenge. I believe he will be able to give an impetus to the National Reform Council and help make important changes in the life of the country," noted President Zelenskyy. By the same decree, IT businessman Oleksandr Olshansky was appointed as Saakashvili's deputy (*Civil.ge, May 7, 2020*).

10. Georgia Recalls Ambassador from Ukraine, Zelenskyy Says 'a Mistake'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's decision to appoint former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili as the head of the Executive Reform Committee of Ukraine has triggered mixed reactions in Tbilisi.

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani stated that the Georgian Government decided to recall Georgian Ambassador to Ukraine Teimuraz Sharashenidze for "consultations."

"It is an acceptable move in diplomatic practice [to recall an Ambassador], which indicates that there are relations are strained and consultations with the ambassador is necessary to take further steps," Zalkaliani clarified (*Civil.ge, May 8, 2020*).

11. MEP Kubilius Writes Georgian President, PM over March 8 Deal, Speaker Talakvadze Responds

Member of European Parliament Andrius Kubilius, Co-President of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, sent a letter addressed to Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili and Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, reminding Georgian leaders that "European partners need a clear confirmation that progress is being made to ensure the necessary conditions for free and fair parliamentary elections in 2020."

The letter was published in totality on a Twitter page of United National Movement, Georgian opposition party.

Georgian Speaker Archil Talakvadze sent a Speaker Talakvadze_MEP Kubilius to MEP Kubilius on May 8. Hailing the March 8 Agreement as "indeed significant for further strengthening the foundations of a healthy and lively political environment, especially in the run-up to the parliamentary elections this year," Georgian Speaker said it was signed "by the Georgian Dream in good faith to contribute to free, fair and competitive elections." (*Civil.ge, May 8, 2020*)

12. OSCE Releases Report on Human Trafficking in Georgia

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) released a report on May 6 delivering a thorough assessment of the issue of trafficking in human beings in Georgia.

The report was compiled by OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Valiant Richey drawing on his visit to Georgia on June 17-19, 2019.

The documents reflects key findings and recommendations by the Special Representative, identifying potential sources of trafficking, and elaborating on remedies from the OSCE best practice.

"Georgia is a country of origin, transit, and destination for various forms of human trafficking," stated the Special Representative on the authority of data and information gathered during his country visit (*Civil.ge, May 8, 2020*).

13. Deputy Foreign Minister Ninua Resigns

Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikheil Ninua has submitted his resignation. Georgian Foreign Ministry told Civil.ge on May 8 that Ninua has been planning to leave the ministry for some time as he received an offer to continue his career in another field.

However, noted the Ministry, as he was directly charged with leading Georgia's efforts to help its citizens abroad during coronavirus pandemic, Ninua has not left the position "until critical phase of pandemic was over."

"We regard him as a highly valuable and distinguished member of [Georgian] diplomatic corps," added the Ministry (*Civil.ge, May 9, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

14. Georgia Unveils Plan to Reopen Tbilisi, Other Quarantined Cities

On May 7, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia announced at a session of the Interagency Coordination Council that considering the current epidemiological situation in the country, the government decided to reopen the city of Tbilisi from May 11 and to lift all restrictions imposed on the movement.

The Georgian capital has been closed since April 15, few days ahead of widely celebrated Easter holiday. PM Gakharia also said that the restrictions on entering and exiting Rustavi and Gardabani will be lifted from May 14.

In the meantime, Marneuli that has been under lockdown since March 23 after the internal transmission of coronavirus in the municipality, will reopen from May 18. PM Gakharia said that considering the epidemiological situation in the town, additional testing should be carried out Marneuli, which will take "additional time."

The Prime Minister noted that production activities, as well as wholesale and retail trade will also be resumed from May 11 (*Civil.ge, May 7, 2020*).

15. Strict Quarantine Regime Lifted in Kvemo Bolnisi Village

Georgian authorities lift strict quarantine regime in the village of Kvemo Bolnisi of the Bolnisi Municipality, according to the local government.

No new cases were confirmed in the village since April 6, allowing authorities to reopen the village for a free movement with four adjacent villages.

Kvemo Bolnisi that has been under lockdown since April 1 has seen six coronavirus cases and two deaths, local authorities reported (*Civil.ge, May 8, 2020*).

16. Total number of cases increased to 638

According to StopCov.ge, total number of registered coronavirus cases increased to 638. Number of recovered patients increased to 317. Number of deceased – 10 (*StopCov.ge, May 11, 2020*).

17. Georgian Leaders on WWII Victory Day, Europe Day

On May 9, Georgian leaders marked WWII Victory Day over Nazi Germany by laying wreath at the tomb of unknown soldier in Vake Park in Tbilisi, as well as commented on Europe Day, which celebrated the anniversary of historic "Schuman Declaration."

In her video address Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili stated that "This day, May 9, has a double importance for Georgia. 75 years have passed since the end of the Second World War, and 70 years – since the birth of the European family, of the idea of the European Union." (*Civil.ge, May 9, 2020*)

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

18. Georgia Unveils Tourism Stimulus Plan, Country to Reopen for Int'l Tourists in July

On May 7, the Georgian government unveiled an "anti-crisis" plan aimed at reviving the tourism sector and opening up the country for international travelers.

The government said it came up with a three-phased plan to gradually reopen the sector, with the final stage – starting from July 1 – foreseeing to reopen national borders and resume flights with major partner states.

The Government committed a fiscal package worth GEL 200 million / USD 62,5 million to undertake relief measures to shore up the tourism industry which had ground to a halt due to the pandemic.

Government's stimulus measures include tax breaks and exemptions, direct subsidies, fiscal incentives and other support for virus-hobbled businesses operating in the tourism industry.

"We are transitioning to the third stage [of COVID-19 response], which means post-crisis management of the economy and devising plans how to kickstart different sectors... Tourism sector will be first to which emergency relief measures will apply," stated Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia at a meeting of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council, a government task force to combat the virus (*Civil.ge, May 7, 2020*).

19. EU, UNDP Launch GEL 9 Mln Grant Programme to Help Georgian Regions Recover from COVID-19 Crisis

The European Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have launched a GEL 9 million grant programme together with the Agriculture and Rural Development Agency (ARDA) of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture "to help Georgia's rural regions respond to the economic and social challenges emerging amidst the COVID-19 crisis" under the ENPARD programme.

According to UNDP, the program will assist non-agricultural business start-ups and growing enterprises with grants worth up to GEL 170,000 per project. Additional grants worth up to GEL 30,000 will be provided to businesses to improve energy efficiency (*Civil.ge, May 7, 2020*).

20. U.S. Pledges Extra USD 3 Mln to Help Georgia Combat COVID-19 Pandemic

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has allocated additional USD 3 million to support Georgia's response to COVID-19 pandemic, Kelly Degnan, the U.S. Ambassador to Georgia stated in a video address released on May 8.

The Ambassador also announced that U.S. Department of Agriculture will donate an additional 27,000 tons of "high-quality" U.S. wheat to support Georgia during the public health emergency (*Civil.ge, May 8, 2020*).

Additional Information

March 9, 2020

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 3.2100 GEL






1 GBP - 3.9727 GEL


100 RUB -4.3595 GEL


1 EUR - 3.4800 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4520 GEL

100 JPY - 3.0181 GEL


Monday 11 May	Tuesday 12 May	Wednesday 13 May	Thursday 14 May	Friday 15 May
				
6° 19°	10° 21°	13° 22°	13° 24°	13° 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](#)**