

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

May 21-24

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Eight More People Recover in Abkhazia

Moscow-backed Abkhazia has reported that eight more patients have recovered from COVID-19, taking the number of recoveries in the region to 14, according to local media. All of the eight recovered patients, the same source noted, are the cadets of the Russian military academies, who have tested positive for the novel coronavirus after their return to the occupied region earlier in May (*Civil.ge, May 23, 2020*).

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

#### 2. Tskhinvali Extends Quarantine Measures Through June 30

Citing epidemiological situation, Moscow-backed Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia extended coronavirus-related restrictions through June 30, according to RES news agency. The restrictions on crossing the Roki Tunnel, the only crossing point connecting the region to the Russian Federation has also been extended until June 30 (*Civil.ge, May 22, 2020*).

#### 3. Tskhinvali Confirms Two New Cases

Moscow-backed Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia authorities have reported two new cases of the novel coronavirus, taking the number of total confirmed cases in the region to 37, according to RES news agency. One of the new patients is a cadet of the Russian military academy, who has recently returned to the region, noted the same source (*Civil.ge, May 24, 2020*).

#### 4. EUMM Denies Tskhinvali Media's 'Disinformation' about its Activities

The EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) released a statement on May 21, denouncing Tskhinvali media outlets' reporting of its activities along the dividing line by as "inaccurate" and containing "completely false references."

According to the statement, several Tskhinvali/South Ossetian media outlets alleged that EUMM's private vehicles (ambulance cars), while on a mission near along the dividing line with the occupied region on April 26, were "in fact" used to collect specimen from locals – intended for use in Georgia's Lugar laboratory, U.S.-funded bio lab subsidiary of the Georgian National Center for Disease Control and Public Health.

EUMM clarified that ambulances have always accompanied its patrols, "as a standard precautionary measure," while Mission's "duty of care" towards its personnel obliged it to "swiftly provide the necessary help in case of need," such as a car accident (*Civil.ge, May 21, 2020*).

#### 5. Georgian Foreign Ministry Decries 'Borderization,' Russian Disinformation

The Georgian Foreign Ministry released a statement on May 22, condemning the illegal “borderization” in Mereti village adjacent to Russian-occupied Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia as well as Russia’s “increased provocations” and disinformation campaign against Georgia during the coronavirus pandemic.

The statement comes a day after the Russian occupying forces were spotted in Tbilisi-controlled Mereti village of Gori Municipality.

The Foreign Ministry said that “while the entire world is fighting against the grave outcomes” of COVID-19, Russian occupying forces keep installing barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers on the dividing lines of both occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (*Civil.ge, May 22, 2020*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### 6. New Deputy Foreign Minister Appointed

Vladimir Konstantinidi, former spokesperson, has been appointed as the new Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia, replacing Mikheil Ninua, who resigned on May 8.

Speaking at a news briefing on May 22, Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani thanked Mikheil Ninua for his service and noted that Vladimir Konstantinidi, given his previous experience, would successfully continue working on his new position (*Civil.ge, May 22, 2020*).

### 7. Georgia’s Reconciliation Minister to be Appointed as Ambassador to Austria

Georgian State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, Ketevan Tsikhelashvili will be appointed as Georgian Ambassador to Austria. She will also serve as Georgia’s representative to Vienna-based international organizations.

Ketevan Tsikhelashvili was appointed as the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality in August 2016. Earlier in 2012-2016, she served as the deputy minister at the same body.

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani announced at a news briefing on May 22 that Tsikhelashvili’s experience would be “extremely important,” as she had constantly dealt with the issues, including conflicts, that are actively discussed by OSCE and other international organizations based in the Austrian capital (*Civil.ge, May 22, 2020*).

### 8. Georgia Backs U.S. on Open Skies Treaty Withdrawal

On May 23, Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani issued a press statement backing the potential U.S. withdrawal from the Treaty on Open Skies, due to an alleged breach of the agreement by Russia.

Minister Zalkaliani said in 2010, Russia imposed restrictions on observation flights in a 10-kilometer corridor off the boundaries occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, claiming these were now “independent countries” and not parties to the Treaty. In Tbilisi’s view, this constituted a breach of the Treaty. In response, Georgia banned Russia from carrying out reconnaissance flights on its territory in 2012.

Minister said he is now “in close communication” with the U.S. as well as other signatories of the Treaty, on whether Georgia should remain a party to the agreement.

On May 21, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo signaled U.S. readiness to pull out from the Treaty, citing Russia’s flagrant and continuous violation of the agreement, including by not allowing flights over the regions of Georgia it occupies. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg supported the U.S.

position, while France, together with ten European countries, said it regretted the decision of the U.S., though shared its concern about the implementation of the Treaty clauses by Russia (*Civil.ge, May 23, 2020*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### **9. Regulations Limiting Number of Passenger Will be Lifted from May 23**

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia announced during the coronavirus task force meeting that an emergency regulation limiting number of passengers to three while driving a private vehicle will be lifted from tomorrow, May 23. However, Gakharia said, the restriction still apply to taxis (*Civil.ge, May 22, 2020*).

### **10. Georgia Ends State of Emergency, Curfew, Keeps Some Restrictions**

Starting from May 23, Georgia ends 63-days long state of emergency, that the government announced on March 21 in a bid to halt the novel coronavirus spread. Initially intended to be effective through April 21, it was then extended for another month until May 22.

The country also lifts 9-hours long curfew that 3.7 million Georgians observed between 21:00 and 06:00 for some 53 days.

In the meantime, a number of restrictions, such as the ban on gathering of more than ten people – for the purposes of weddings, funerals, and other social events – remain in force.

Quarantine regime is lifted in southern Georgia's Bolnisi Municipality that has been under lockdown since March 23, the government spokesperson Irakli Chikovani stated on Friday. Chikovani said, however, that two villages in Bolnisi district – Mushevani and Geta – remain under strict quarantine regime. Tetrtskaro – yet another location of Georgia's coronavirus outbreak that has been placed under lockdown on April 26 – also remains shut down, noted the government spokesperson (*Civil.ge, May 23, 2020*).

### **11. Georgian Parliament Passes Bill Granting Gov't Emergency-Like Powers**

On May 22, the Georgian Parliament rushed through controversial amendments to the Law on Public Health granting the Government temporary emergency-like powers through July 15 after the state of emergency is lifted on May 23.

The draft amendments, tabled by six Georgian Dream MPs, were passed with the third hearing with 80 votes for and 0 against. The opposition did not take part in the vote.

The bill authorizes the Government to enforce lockdown measures on public health security grounds, which may entail imposing restrictions on a wide spectrum of constitutional rights and freedoms, such as freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, and property, economic and labor rights.

The proposed piece of legislation was met with a barrage of criticism from the opposition and has concerned much of Georgia's civil society.

Opposition lawmakers claimed the Government was effectively extending emergency powers "without any time limit," and accused it of sidestepping the Parliament, as Government-imposed regulations will not fall under due parliamentary scrutiny.

United National Movement MP Roman Gotsiridze dubbed the law as “dictatorial,” while others railed against what they consider ruling party’s thinly veiled attempt to chip away essential human rights (*Civil.ge, May 22, 2020*).

#### **12. Georgia Reports One New Case, 4 More Recoveries**

Georgia has confirmed one new case of the novel coronavirus, bringing the number of total cases to 731, the government-run StopCov.ge website reports. In the meantime, four more patient have recovered, increasing the number of overall recoveries to 526. With 526 recoveries and 12 deaths, the number of active coronavirus cases drops to 193 (*StopCov.ge, May 25, 2020*).

#### **13. Parliament Passes Controversial Amendments to Forest Code of Georgia**

On May 22, the Georgian Parliament endorsed the amendments to the Forest Code of Georgia with its third reading with 79 votes in favor and none against – amid strong criticism voiced by the civil society organizations.

According to the newly adopted law, Georgian Orthodox Churches and Monasteries, “based on Church’s request and through mediation of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture” will be able to gain ownership of forest areas (no more than 20 ha) adjacent to their church houses (*Civil.ge, May 22, 2020*).

### **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **14. French Development Agency Allocates EUR 190 Mln to Support Georgia in COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis**

The French Development Agency (AFD) and the Georgian Finance Ministry signed two loan agreements for a total of EUR 190 million aimed to support Georgia’s healthcare and economy during the COVID-19 crisis.

The first loan agreement, amounting to EUR 70 million, aims to “continue supporting the Georgian health and social protection system.”

The second loan agreement, amounting to EUR 120 million, aims to “deepen the reforms of the electricity sector with specific attention paid to the care of vulnerable consumers.” (*Civil.ge, May 22, 2020*)

## **Additional Information**

**March 9, 2020**

### **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.7748 GEL

1 GBP - 3.6067 GEL

100 RUB - 4.0872 GEL

1 EUR - 3.1386 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4555 GEL

100 JPY - 2.6336 GEL

**Monday**

9 March



4° 17°

**Tuesday**

10 March



5° 19°

**Wednesday**

11 March



9° 23°

**Thursday**

12 March



8° 22°

**Friday**

13 March



9° 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](#)**



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