

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

May 28-31

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. FAO Delivers 15,000 Animal Vaccines to Abkhazia

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a specialized UN agency, has delivered 15,000 animal vaccines to occupied Georgian region of Abkhazia to stem the spread of zoonotic diseases, local media reported.

According to the source, FAO support was financed in the framework of the European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development, which is run by the EU (*Civil.ge, May 28, 2020*).

#### 2. UNDP Delivers Fourth Batch of Medical Aid to Abkhazia

UNDP delivered the fourth batch of medical aid to Abkhazia to help the region contain public health crisis, Sokhumi-based Apsnypress news agency reported.

Medical and hygiene aid, including 920 medical gowns, 900 pairs of nitrile gloves, 4,500 medical caps, 1,000 shoe covers and 180 liters of hand sanitizer, was delivered today to the Gudauta Hospital, the Black Sea region's main medical facility treating COVID-19 patients.

In addition to medical and hygiene materials, UNDP provided the Gudauta Hospital with a video conferencing equipment. According to the same source, UNDP will provide similar equipment kits to the Republican Hospital, the Republican Tuberculosis Hospital, the Sanitary and Epidemiological Service as well as the hospitals in the towns of Gagra and Ochamchire. The USD 11,000 support for the said initiative was covered by the USAID-funded Horizons Project (*Civil.ge, May 28, 2020*).

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

#### 3. Tskhinvali Confirms One New Case, Two More Recoveries

Moscow-backed Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia has reported one new case of COVID-19, taking the number of total confirmed cases in the region to 38, according to local RES news agency. The region's new coronavirus patient is a cadet of Russian higher education establishment who has recently returned to the region. In the meantime, region reports two more recoveries (*Civil.ge, May 29, 2020*).

#### 4. Tskhinvali Reports One New Case of COVID-19

Moscow-backed authorities in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia have reported one new case of the novel coronavirus, taking the number of the region's total confirmed cases to 39, according to RES news agency (*Civil.ge, May 30, 2020*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### 5. NCDC Georgia: 'Moscow No Longer Calling Shots'

Amiran Gamkrelidze, the Head of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health of Georgia, which runs the Lugar Research Center, brushed away Russia's bio-warfare allegations about the Center. Voicing a stiffly worded address to his Russian counterparts, Gamkrelidze said thirty years passed since the demise of the Soviet union and that "Moscow is no longer calling the shots."

In a briefing aired on May 28, NCDC Head Amiran Gamkrelidze turned down Moscow's request to allow a team – staffed solely by Russian experts – to inspect Center's facilities.

Gamkrelidze stressed that Russian experts were not entitled to preferential treatment and they would only be authorized to inspect Lugar Center premises in the framework of an international mission.

Gamkrelidze's Deputy Paata Imnadze, who is directly in charge of leading the Center, referred to a thorough inspection conducted under the aegis of the Biological Weapons Convention, underlining that Russia refused to take part in that mission (*Civil.ge, May 29, 2020*).

### 6. Int'l Community Condemns Russian 'Borderization' in Georgia

The United States Department of State Spokesperson, Morgan Ortagus stated that the U.S. condemns ongoing "borderization" by Russian-led security forces in Georgia.

"We renew our demand that Russia end its occupation of 20 percent of Georgia, fulfill its 2008 commitments, withdraw its forces, and allow unimpeded delivery of international humanitarian assistance," Ortagus wrote on Twitter on May 29 [Tbilisi time].

Spokesperson was followed by the high ranking officials from other states like, Czech Foreign Affairs Minister, representatives of Lithuania, UK and US to the OSCE (*Civil.ge, May 29, 2020*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### 7. Intracity Municipal Transport Resumed

All kinds of intracity municipal transport services – including Tbilisi Metro – resumed throughout Georgia. The municipal transportation has been suspended throughout the country since March 31 (*Civil.ge, May 29, 2020*).

### 8. Georgia Reports 11 New Cases, 24 Recoveries

Georgia has reported eleven new cases of novel coronavirus, increasing the number of total confirmed cases to 757. In the meantime, 24 more patients have recovered, taking the number of recoveries to 600 (*Civil.ge, May 30, 2020*).

### 9. Georgia Reports 26 New Cases, 5 More Recoveries

Georgia has reported 26 new cases of the novel coronavirus. Marina Ezugbaia, Medical Director of Tbilisi Hospital of Infectious Diseases, Georgia's major medical facility treating coronavirus patients, told journalists that out of the 26 new patients 18 come from southern Bolnisi Municipality's quarantined Mushevani village. Another four new patients belong to a newly emerged 'cluster of Saburtalo,' Ezugbaia added.

On May 30, NCDC head Amiran Gamkrelidze told journalists that out of the yesterday's registered 11 cases, 9 have contracted the disease in Saburtalo – a neighborhood in the capital Tbilisi's middle-west –

from the two patients who tested positive for coronavirus earlier. Thus, today's four new cases bring the number of Saburtalo cluster patients to 15.

Gamkrelidze stated yesterday that Georgian health officials are trying to detect the source of infection in Saburtalo cluster. NCDC head suspected that the cluster's source of infection was a medical worker, who might have transmitted COVID-19 to the family members (*May 31, 2020*).

#### **10. Georgia Reports 11 New Cases, 19 More Recoveries**

11 more people have tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Georgia, bringing the number of total confirmed cases 794. Marina Ezugbaia, Medical Director of Tbilisi Hospital of Infectious Diseases, told journalists that out of the 11 new patients, 8 are linked to the Saburtalo cluster of patients, while three others have transmitted the virus in village Mareti of southern Bolnisi Municipality. In the meantime, 19 more patients have recovered, taking the number of recoveries to 624 (*Civil.ge, June 1, 2020*).

#### **11. Lawmakers Question PM over Georgia's Handling of COVID-19**

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia answered Georgian lawmakers' questions over his Cabinet's handling of the coronavirus crisis just after he had delivered an hour-and-a-half long speech in the Parliament on May 27.

MPs' questions covered a wide range of topics, including an appeal to abolish fines issued for breaching emergency rules, the belated submission of the amended budget to the parliament, the possible signs of corruption in the public procurements made by the Government during the state of emergency, "double-standard treatment" of citizens, and the "political crisis" in the country.

Asked about the abolition of fines, the PM said it was a punitive measure at Government's disposal, in order to effectively enforce some of public health recommendations – flouted by some parts of the population.

"We cannot call for abolishing these fees, for the constraining power shall be null in that case," Gakharia remarked.

Gakharia dubbed opposition's proposal to cut taxes as "demagogic" and urged them to put forward better "thought-out recommendations" for the executive branch (*Civil.ge, May 28, 2020*).

#### **12. Georgian PM Faces Question Time in Parliament Again**

On May 29, the Georgian lawmakers questioned the Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia using new procedural tool at their disposal "an interpellation rule". The factions of the United National Movement and European Georgia posed questions to the Prime Minister, ranging from poverty rate to the possibility of tax cuts.

The United National Movement's questions were about the "growing poverty rates" in the country and the government's plan to get out of the crisis. European Georgia wondered as to why the government does not reduce taxes and bureaucratic costs, and why it does not allow the citizens to withdraw the savings transferred in the pension fund amid pandemic.

Asking a question on behalf of the UNM, MP Roman Gotsiridze said that the Georgian government is the only government in the world that did not directly help its own citizens during the public health crisis.

He noted that the promises made by the Georgian Dream-led government within the framework of the anti-crisis plan were in fact "corruption plans" that reflect "money-making scheme" in benefit for companies with close relations with the government.

In response, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia acknowledged that poverty remains a "structural problem" in the country's economy, however, he said that the situation had improved in the recent years. Recalling various social programs (free school textbooks, "universal health care", etc.) implemented by the GD-led government, the Prime Minister said the government keeps working to help the citizens (*Civil.ge*, May 30, 2020).

### **13. Top Court Picks Vasil Roinishvili as Constitutional Court Justice**

On May 29, the Plenum of the Supreme Court elected Vasil Roinishvili as a new justice of the nine-member Constitutional Court for a ten-year term.

Roinishvili, 43, served as Vice Chairman of the Supreme Court of Georgia and Chairman of the Administrative Division, and has been a judge at the top court since December 2009. Earlier, in 2008-2009 he served as the deputy chief prosecutor.

Prior to that, in February – June 2004 Roinishvili served in the Security Ministry under Zurab Adeishvili. In June 2004 – December 2006 he worked in the Prosecutor's Office as the head of HR department, reporting to Adeishvili.

*Zurab Adeishvili, an influential figure of former President Mikheil Saakashvili's inner circle, served as the Security Minister during February – June 2004 and as Chief Prosecutor until January 2008. His track record has been widely criticized by human rights groups for summary sentencing and widespread prisoner abuse, and he has also been vilified by the current administration as one of the pillars of Saakashvili's rule. He was recently sentenced two years in prison in absentia by the Georgian court on charged of closing down Iberia TV and seizing its broadcasting license in 2004 (Civil.ge, May 29, 2020).*

### **14. Georgian Security Service to Probe Incitement of Ethnic Strife**

The State Security Service, Georgia's domestic intelligence agency, has launched a probe into the alleged racial discrimination by "certain groups and individuals," trying to "stir up strife" between ethnic Georgians and Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions.

According to the statement of May 30, the State Security Service announced that the said groups and individuals, interfering into the competence of national authorities, have been using pseudo-patriotic issues to instigate "ethnic hostility" and endanger the "peaceful cohabitation" of the two ethnicities.

The statement also reads that in their public statements and ideology the group attempts to portray the situation in such a way as if ethnic Georgian citizens have priority compared to other ethnicities, that, according to the domestic intelligence agency "increases the risks of triggering inter-ethnic conflict." (*Civil.ge*, May 31, 2020)

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

### **15. Georgia Unveils Plan to Help Construction Business amid Pandemic**

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia together with Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze unveiled a plan worth of GEL 434 million (USD 136 million) to help battered construction business amid COVID-19 pandemic.

At a meeting with the representatives of construction companies on May 28, PM Gakharia stated that given the share of the construction sector in GDP (9%) and the number of employees – 120,000 direct employees – in the sector, the support for the construction companies is of a vital importance for the recovery of the economy as a whole.

The government plan includes allocating GEL 70 million for subsidizing the mortgage loans; GEL 14 million for guaranteeing the mortgage loan; GEL 150 million for providing the internally displaced persons (IDPs) with apartments; and GEL 200 million for the state to guarantee completion of unfinished constructions (*Civil.ge, May 28, 2020*).

#### **16. ADB Approves USD 100 Mln Loan for Georgia's Coronavirus Response**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) announced on May 28 that it had approved a USD 100 million loan to help Georgia contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, mitigate the impact on businesses, and protect the livelihoods of the most vulnerable.

Noting that "as a major trade and tourism hub, COVID-19 poses a grave threat to the health and economic wellbeing of Georgia," ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa said the Bank is "fully committed to supporting" Georgia's COVID-19 response (*Civil.ge, May 28, 2020*).

#### **17. Public Opinion Survey Reveals Georgians' Attitudes to Minimum Wage**

On May 27, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) released a public opinion survey, revealing that about 3/4 of Georgians support having a minimum wage, with the perceived decent minimum wage, on average, amounting to GEL 854.1 (USD 267).

According to the survey, 48% of respondents say they fully support the idea; 27% – partially support having a minimum wage; 12% – partially or fully oppose the idea, while 12% either don't know or refuse to answer.

The survey revealed that the persons with higher education have a 78% chance of supporting minimum wage. Probabilities are lower for respondents with vocational (74%) and secondary (70%) education (*Civil.ge, May 28, 2020*).

#### **18. Geostat: Georgia's GDP Declines 16.6% in April**

Georgia's real GDP declined 16.6% year-on-year in April, according to the preliminary data released by the National Statistics Office (Geostat) on May 29.

The corresponding figure for March stood at -2.7%, after 5.1% and 2.2% y/y growth in January and February, respectively.

"In April 2020 the estimated real growth compared to the same period of the previous year was posted negative in almost all activities," Geostat said, however, adding that the growth was registered in mining and quarrying (*Civil.ge, May 29, 2020*).

## **Additional Information**

**June 1, 2020**

### **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 3.1761 GEL






1 GBP - 3.9161 GEL

100 RUB - 4.5026 GEL


1 EUR - 3.5366 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4654 GEL

100 JPY - 2.9625 GEL


Monday 1 June	Tuesday 2 June	Wednesday 3 June	Thursday 4 June	Friday 5 June
				
15° 28°	15° 29°	15° 30°	14° 30°	14° 26°

 **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](#)**