

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

June 4-7

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

Date: **June 8, 2020**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Abkhazia Confirms 7 New Cases, Total Rises to 35

Moscow-backed authorities in Abkhazia have reported seven new cases of the novel coronavirus, increasing the number of total confirmed cases in the region to 35. Sokhumi-based media reported that the region's new patients are cadets of the Russian higher education institutions who have recently returned to Abkhazia from Moscow. The patients will be transferred to Gudauta Hospital, Abkhazia's main medical facility treating the persons infected with COVID-19 (*June 4, 2020*).

2. Abkhazia Confirms One New Case

Moscow-backed Abkhaz authorities have reported one new case of the novel coronavirus, bringing the number of total confirmed cases in the region to 36. According to local media, Abkhazia's 36th patient is the cadet of a Russian higher education institution, who has recently returned to the Black Sea region. The patient will be transferred to Gudauta Hospital, Abkhazia's main medical facility treating COVID-19 patients (*Civil.ge, June 6, 2020*).

3. Bzhania Talks 'Alarming' Gap in Abkhazia Budget, Aid Withheld by Moscow

Aslan Bzhania, Kremlin-backed leader of Abkhazia, voiced his concern about the "alarming" financial situation in the region prompted by falling budget revenues at a meeting with Abkhaz assembly "deputies" on June 2.

The Abkhaz leader said that the budget revenues have halved during last months, allowing to cover only essential expenditures, such as salaries, pensions, and healthcare costs.

He noted that Russia, Sokhumi's chief financial benefactor, has withheld assistance for infrastructure projects for six months' time, resulting in a raft of infrastructure projects being stalled or delayed (*Civil.ge, June 4, 2020*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

4. Tskhinvali Records 12 More Cases, Total Increases to 57

Moscow-backed authorities of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia have reported 12 new cases of the coronavirus infection, according to "RES" news agency.

All twelve patients are cadets at Russian military academies, stated Anna Gagloeva, a local public health "official." The total number of confirmed cases has risen to 57, while recoveries stand 31 (*Civil.ge, June 5, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

5. Visegrád Four, Nordic-Baltic Eight Reaffirm Support for Georgia

At the 8th annual meeting held via videoconference held on June 3, the Foreign Ministers of the Visegrád Group and Nordic-Baltic Eight reiterated their support for Georgia and other Eastern Partnership countries.

In their joint press release, the Foreign Ministers pledged to uphold independence and territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine.

"Lasting international security, stability and peace requires genuine and continuous adherence to international law and norms, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states," the Ministers stressed (*Civil.ge, June 4, 2020*).

6. CSOs Call on Georgian Gov't to Help COVID-hit Armenia

Ten local civil society organizations have appealed to the Georgian government to provide assistance to neighboring Armenia that has been hit hard by the pandemic.

In the statement released on June 5, the group urged the authorities to demonstrate solidarity and a spirit of cooperation towards Armenia, which – in turn – would lay the ground for joint measures to contain the regional spread of the virus.

Signatories include the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, Georgian Democracy Initiative, Open Society Foundation Georgia, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, Human Rights Center, Tolerance and Diversity Center, Women's Initiatives Supporting Group, Equality Movement, Union "Sapari", and "Salam" – a civic activism platform of ethnic Azeri Georgians.

Based on Georgia's "successful handling" of the first wave of the virus spread, CSOs suggested Georgian healthcare system could offer "tangible assistance" to Armenia in order to avoid large-scale outbreak in the region.

The signatories maintained that international solidarity and cooperation was a "necessary precondition" for mitigating the fallout of the pandemic and preventing high mortality rate (*Civil.ge, June 5, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

7. Georgian Gov't Releases Report Recapping COVID-19 Measures

The Georgian government issued a [report](#) on June 4 summing up measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic since late January – a month before the country registered its first virus case on February 26.

As stated in the report, Georgia has imposed restrictions on travel since the early days of the outbreak – in order to arrest 'the rapid and mass import' of the virus. Meanwhile, it notes, 12,720 Georgian citizens were brought back from abroad between February 2 – May 22.

As of May 22, the number of Georgian citizens residing abroad, who were infected with COVID-19, stood at 118. Sixteen Georgians have died of the coronavirus-related complications (1 in Austria, 4 in Spain, 1 in Turkey, 2 in the United Kingdom, 5 in the United States, 2 in France and 1 in Latvia) (*Civil.ge, June 4, 2020*).

8. Quarantine Regime to be Lifted in Tetrtskaro Municipality

The Government announced that strict lockdown measures in place in Tetrtskaro municipality – one of Georgia's COVID-19 hotspots – will be lifted.

Prime Minister Gakharia said the decision was made after no new cases of coronavirus infection had been detected regionwide within the last two weeks. “Meanwhile, we call upon [Tetristskaro] residents to exercise caution and stay alert,” Gakharia added (*Civil.ge, June 4, 2020*).

9. 1 New Case, 11 More Recoveries Reported

Georgia has reported one new case of the novel coronavirus, increasing the number of total confirmed cases to 809. In the meantime, eleven more patients have recovered, increasing the tally of recoveries to 674 (*Civil.ge, June 7, 2020*).

10. Georgia Closes Gülen-Affiliated School in Rustavi

The National Center for Education Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), an agency at the Georgian Ministry of Education, overseeing conformity of educational institutions with standards set by the Georgian legislation, moved to revoke authorization for Shota Rustaveli School-Lyceum in the city of Rustavi, operated by the Chaglar Educational Institutions, a Gülen-affiliated network in Georgia.

At its online meeting on May 15, the NCEQE authorization council decided not to renew the school “authorization,” a certificate required for any institution to carry out educational activities in Georgia, citing the problems related to the curriculum, school infrastructure and other issues.

Commenting on the decision of the NCEQE authorization council, the School-Lyceum stated that a team of lawyers will defend the school rights and use “all legal levers” for duly resumption of authorization.

Turkish authorities have long been openly expressing concerns over the operation of Gülen-affiliated schools in Georgia. Ankara accuses U.S.-based Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen and his followers of a 2016 failed coup (*Civil.ge, June 4, 2020*).

11. Nationwide Discussions on Constitutional Amendments Launched

The nationwide public discussions on the proposed constitutional amendments, envisage changing the country’s electoral system ahead of 2020 parliamentary polls, as agreed in March 8 deal between the ruling Georgian Dream and opposition parties, was launched on the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) on June 4.

The respective bill registered by the Georgian Dream on March 11, envisages electing the next convocation of the Georgian Parliament in October 2020 through a 120/30 formula instead of the current 77/73, meaning that Georgians will elect 120 lawmakers through proportional party lists and 30 MPs as majoritarians through single mandate constituencies.

Public consultations, that are required for making any constitutional amendments, are normally held via face-to-face meetings with the citizens. The current discussions, however, are held remotely – broadcasted by TV channels – due to the COVID-19 pandemic fears (*Civil.ge, June 4, 2020*).

12. TI Georgia: Changes to Parliamentary Rules of Procedure Diminish Opposition’s Rights

On June 5, Transparency International Georgia, a local watchdog, released an analysis of the proposed changes to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia, which, according to the CSO, diminish the rights opposition MPs enjoy under the current legislation.

The watchdog has negatively assessed the draft law, initiated by the ruling Georgian Dream party lawmakers Irakli Kobakhidze, Giorgi Kakhiani, Mamuka Mdinaradze and Guram Macharashvili on May 25, stating that the proposed changes aim to grant additional privileges for the parliamentary majority. The initiators of the draft bill noted that “certain gaps” have been identified in the current version of Rules of Procedure, that entered into force upon Salome Zurbishvili’s inauguration as the President on

December 16, 2018. Georgian Dream lawmakers said the proposed changes aim “to bring the Rules of Procedure in line with the main principles (that still need to be enacted) of the Constitution.” (*Civil.ge*, June 5, 2020).

13. Media Advocacy Coalition: Adjara TV Continues to Persecute Journalists

Coalition for Media Advocacy, uniting over ten local media watchdogs, responded to the dismissal of Shorena Glonti, former head of Adjara TV newsroom, maintaining that outspoken journalists expressing dissenting opinions are persecuted by the new management of the regional public broadcaster.

The statement came on June 4, as the news emerged earlier that day that Adjara TV and Radio Company reportedly refused to continue the contract with Shorena Glonti, who served as a news website consultant over the past three months. Earlier in February, Glonti, a key figure in maintaining the editorial independence of the broadcaster, was dismissed as the head of newsroom.

“The developments around Adjara TV are critical and should not remain beyond public attention,” the Coalition stressed (*Civil.ge*, June 6, 2020).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

14. U.S. Allocates Additional USD 1 Mln to Georgia in COVID-19 Aid

The U.S. Government has committed USD 1 million in new USAID funding to support Georgia’s response to COVID-19.






According to USAID Georgia, the new assistance will be provided in partnership with UNICEF and will entail delivering hygiene and medical supplies to health facilities, support for rapid response teams, case management, and infection control, strengthening public health communications (*Civil.ge*, June 4, 2020).








Additional Information

June 8, 2020

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.9562 GEL	1 GBP - 3.7328 GEL	100 RUB -4.2963 GEL
1 EUR - 3.3476 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4365 GEL	100 JPY -2.7054 GEL

Monday 8 June	Tuesday 9 June	Wednesday 10 June	Thursday 11 June	Friday 12 June
				
17° 31°	17° 31°	18° 32°	18° 32°	19° 33°

-  **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](#)**