

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

June 18-21

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Occupied Abkhazia to temporarily open Enguri Bridge crossing point

Georgia's Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia will temporarily open the Enguri Bridge crossing point, which connects the occupied region with the rest of Georgia, from 9am to 7pm on July 22-24.

The region's de facto 'security service' announced on Friday that a 'humanitarian corridor' will be ensured to allow residents of Abkhazia return to their homes from Tbilisi-controlled area (*Agenda.ge, June 21, 2020*).

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

#### 2. Tskhinvali Reports 3 Recoveries

Moscow-backed authorities of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia registered 3 new recoveries from coronavirus, bringing the total 43, according to "Res" news agency. The number of active cases currently stands at 37 (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

#### 3. German Coronavirus Quarantine to Spare Travelers from Georgia

Georgians traveling to Germany will be exempt from going into 14-day mandatory quarantine upon arrival.

German authorities have excluded Georgia, relatively mildly affected by the virus, from a list of countries whose citizens are subject to quarantine rules. To date, it remains unknown when air travel between Georgia and Germany will resume (*Civil.ge, June 18, 2020*).

#### 4. Germany Says Russian Govt Behind Khangoshvili Murder

The Federal Prosecutor of Germany has filed charges against a Russian national suspected of killing Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, an ethnic Chechen/Kist citizen of Georgia, who was shot dead in Berlin last August.

On June 18, Chief Prosecutor Peter Frank indicted Vadim Krasikov on charges of murdering Khangoshvili on "Russian central authorities' orders."

Khangoshvili (also known as Tornike Kavtarashvili), 40, was gunned down in broad daylight in the German capital on August 23. A Georgian of Chechen descent, he fled to Germany after surviving an assassination attempt in Tbilisi in 2015 (*Civil.ge, June 18, 2020*).

## **5. Embassy says German Prosecutor's Office used 'unclear formulation' when calling Georgian gov't 'pro-Russian'**

The Embassy of Germany to Georgia says that the Federal Prosecution of Germany used 'unclear phrasing' when it called the Georgian government 'pro-Russian' in the statement related to the murder of Georgian citizen of Chechen origin Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in Berlin.

German Ambassador to Georgia Hubert Knirsch said that the wording 'pro-Russian' was how Khangoshvili characterised the Georgian government and not the Federal Prosecution of Germany, adding that the agency should have been clearer in the statement.

He stated that German law enforcement agencies did not intend to characterise the Georgian government in any way, expressing worries that the wording sparked speculations and misinterpretation (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

## **6. RSF Calls for 'Thorough, Transparent' Probe Into Alleged Plot to Murder Georgian Anchor**

Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a Paris-based international media watchdog, has called for "a thorough and transparent investigation" into an alleged plot to murder Georgian TV anchor Giorgi Gabunia "using a suspected Russian hitman."

In a statement released on June 18, the watchdog appealed to Georgian authorities to place Gabunia under protection.

RSF cited a Georgian media outlet claiming that a Russian national of Ingush descent, arrested on June 12, was sent by Ramzan Kadyrov, who "rules Ingushetia's neighbor, the autonomous Chechen Republic, with an iron hand." (*Civil.ge, June 18, 2020*)

## **7. EU, EaP States Pledge to Deepen Ties at Videoconference Meeting**

On June 18, leaders of EU member states and six Eastern Partnership countries (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine), held an online summit, discussing the future of their strategic partnership, as well as the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said in his remarks that Georgia's foreign priorities, including its gradual integration into European single market, will be "a key benchmark" for the EaP. "We expect that an approach based on interests and progress of partners will be maintained," Gakharia stated.

Speaking of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Gakharia said the country relies on the EU support for securing these principles and "for a greater engagement in the peaceful conflict resolution within Georgia and in partnership at large."

The Georgian PM also referred to the COVID-19 crisis, saying that to date, almost all restrictive measures have been lifted, and that Georgia is getting ready "for a gradual, but cautious re-opening" of its borders. Therefore, he expressed hope that EU countries would designate Georgia as "a safe country" after reopening their borders (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

## **8. Georgian ambassador to Kazakhstan tests positive for coronavirus**

The Georgian Foreign Ministry has confirmed the information earlier today, stating that Abashidze is currently undergoing treatment in Kazakhstan.

Zurab Abashidze is undergoing treatment under the supervision of specialists who are in constant communication with Georgian doctors", the Ministry says.

The number of confirmed cases of the coronavirus has exceeded over 16,000 in Kazakhstan. 106 individuals have died of the virus (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### 9. Gov't Relaxes Rules on Holding Educational, Sporting Events Outdoors

The Georgian government has allowed holding educational events, such as conferences and seminars, as well as exercising some outdoor sporting activities – rafting, kayaking, canyoning, and other action sports – provided that all participants observe guidelines devised by the Health ministry (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

### 10. 8 New Cases, 3 Recoveries Recorded

According to Stopcov.ge, with eight new cases of the novel coronavirus, the number of total cases in Georgia has increased to 906. In the meantime, three infected individuals recovered, bringing the total recoveries to 755 (*Civil.ge, June 21, 2020*).

### 11. EPP Calls for Implementing March 8 Deal, Rurua's Release

The European People's Party, a group of European center-right parties, has welcomed the March 8 Agreement between Georgia's ruling party and opposition "as a key step to reduce tensions," while voicing concern that Giorgi Rurua, pro-opposition Mtavari Arkhi TV's shareholder, remains in custody. "We call for full implementation of the Agreement and Rurua's release," EPP head Donald Tusk tweeted as he took part in the EPP summit on June 17.

EPP expects the upcoming election campaign in Georgia to be "free of vote-buying, intimidation of voters, impunity for violence and abuse of administrative resources, as international monitors reported in the last elections," Tusk wrote (*Civil.ge, June 18, 2020*).

### 12. NCDC Releases Second Report on COVID-19 Outbreak in Georgia

#### COVID-19 patient profile

Georgia's chief public health authority provided a breakdown of data collected from 800 patients treated for a disease caused by the novel coronavirus, among them 390 men (48.7%) and 410 women (51.2%).

Average age of patients – as well as median age – stood at 42. Most recorded cases – 51.5% out of 800 patients – fall into 30-59 age category.

#### How contagious is the virus?

As of June 11, rate of cumulative incidence – measuring disease frequency during a given period of time in the population – hovered around 17.3 infected persons per 100,000 people.

Effective reproduction number, another key benchmark wielded by epidemiologists, equaled 3.88 after two weeks since the occurrence of first COVID-19 case in Georgia, and – remarkably – it dipped to 0.44 at the end of the reporting period.

To put it simply, a single infected individual is now likely to transmit COVID-19 to less than one person on average, hence the spread of the virus is certainly on the decline.

#### Taking stock of COVID-19 testing

From January 30 to June 11, 75,374 PCR tests were carried out in public health, clinical and commercial laboratories to diagnose COVID-19 infection – a bulk of them (35.5%) performed by NCDC's Lugar lab.

As the graph attests, Georgia has significantly ramped up testing starting from mid-April, topping 1,469 tests performed daily in the second half of May.

As of June 11, test-positive rate – showing the ratio between who got tested for the virus and who tested positive for it – amounted to 1.2%.

NCDC estimated that frequency of infected patients among healthcare personnel is fluctuating within the range of 5-20% (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

### **13. New Opinion Poll Gauges Georgians' Attitude to Elections, Political Participation**

79% of the adult population believe that Georgian politics "needs a new political force," according to a new a public opinion survey released by Transparency International Georgia on June 19.

According to the survey, 64% of respondents were aware that, last November, the Parliament voted down the constitutional amendment envisaging transition to fully proportional electoral system from 2020.

Out of 64 % who said they knew about the voting-down, 31 % holds Bidzina Ivanishvili responsible for failure to pass the constitutional amendments, and 25 % lays the blame on the ruling party. 14 % of respondents said it was due to "the free will of individual majoritarian MPs."

The survey assessed public opinion on the role of ethnic minorities in Georgia's political life. According to the breakdown, 9% of the respondents consider their participation as a "very important issue," 47% deem it "important," 24% – "not so important," and 9% – "not important at all."

36 % of those surveyed subscribed to the view that "ethnic diversity strengthens the country," while 31 % said it "weakened" the state on the whole (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

### **14. Mediators Call All Parties to March 8 Deal to Vote for Election Reform**

Heads of U.S., EU and German diplomatic missions in Georgia, who facilitate the political dialogue between the ruling Georgian Dream party and the opposition, issued a joint statement on June 19 reiterating their appeal to "fully implement the March 8 agreement," and urging all signatories to ensure that relevant amendments on election reform are adopted by the Parliament (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

### **15. Opposition Parties Agree to Run Joint Candidates in 6 Single-Mandate Districts**

A dozen of opposition parties, all signatories to the March 8 Deal on election reform, have agreed to run joint candidates in six majoritarian districts in the capital city of Tbilisi for the October parliamentary election.

After lengthy talks to smooth out differences among diverse political outfits, parties unveiled the following contenders to run in each of the six single-mandate districts:

- **Elene Khoshtaria** of European Georgia in *Vake* district;
- **Nika Melia** of United National Movement in *Gldani*;
- **Giorgi Vashadze** of New Georgia in *Isani*;
- **Levan Khabeishvili** of United National Movement in *Samgori*;
- **Shalva Shavgulidze** of Free Democrats in *Mtatsminda-Krtsanisi*;
- **Shalsva Natelashvili** of Labor Party in *Nadzaladevi* (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

### **16. European Georgia Pledges to Vote for Constitutional Amendments In First Reading**

The parliamentary opposition European Georgia party announced on June 20 that it will vote for the package of constitutional amendments in its first reading at the Parliament's special session on Sunday. Speaking at a news briefing at the party office earlier today, Davit Bakradze, one of the leaders of European Georgia, stressed the importance of tomorrow's voting for the implementation of the March 8 agreement between the opposition and Georgian Dream, saying that it will decide the fate of "proportional elections," "political prisoners" and "normal elections" in the country (*Civil.ge, June 21, 2020*).

### **17. Georgian Parliament Endorses Constitutional Amendments in First Reading**

At a special session held on June 21, the Georgian parliament passed constitutional amendments on electoral change in the first reading with an overwhelming support from lawmakers.

If approved in second and third readings, the amendments will clear the way for overhauling current electoral system.

The proposed legislation foresees introducing a parliamentary composition based on 120 proportional and 30 majoritarian seats, and fixing the election threshold at 1 % of votes. The bill will also enact a constraint barring any single party that receives less than 40 % of votes from claiming a majority of seats in the Parliament, and hence, from forming the government on its own.

Of the 142 lawmakers who attended the session, 136 voted in favor of electoral reform bill, and 5 voted against it (*Civil.ge, June 21, 2020*).

### **18. Political Assessments on the Constitutional Amendments**

**Mamuka Mdinaradze, Leader of GD Majority in Parliament**, stated that "Georgian Dream kept its promise and 92 deputies backed the changes," adding that ruling party MPs will vote for the amendments in the upcoming sessions as well.

**UNM lawmaker Roman Gotsiridze** said Parliament's decision to pass the reform bill was a "significant step," adding that his party would back the amendments if "all clauses of March 8 Deal are fully implemented" by the Government.

**European Georgia MP Davit Bakradze** stated that votes of fellow lawmakers from his party cast in favor of the electoral reform were "decisive," which he said would prevent Georgian Dream from "deceiving the society" once more [referring to voting down of constitutional amendments in November last year by a group of GD MPs] (*Civil.ge, June 21, 2020*).

### **19. Creation of new political platform sparks controversies, rivalry between former allies**

High Council of Justice member Anna Dolidze, opposition leader Aleko Elisashvili and independent MP Levan Koberidze have created a new political platform with plans to transform it into a political party. The three say that they aim to create 'a different platform and a new reality.'

We have a clean past, we have always fought, worked for a better future for the country. Now the fight will become more devoted to Georgia's success and its Euro-Atlantic integration," Dolidze, Koberidze and Elisashvili said.

They say that the country's current agenda is monopolised by two political forces 'which are making false promises and [in doing so] empowering each other.' At the end of May Dolidze founded the civic movement For the People.

Before announcing the new political platform yesterday, seven NGOs, including Transparency International Georgia and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, urged Dolidze to leave her post if she had plans to enter politics.

The same appeal was made by another non-judge member of the High Council of Justice Nazi Janezashvili who has frequently appeared with Dolidze, stating that most judge members of the High Council of Justice were politically biased and 'run by a clan' (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2020*).

#### **20. President Zurabishvili expects High Council of Justice member Anna Dolidze to make 'respectable decision'**

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili expects non-judge member of Georgia's High Council of Justice Anna Dolidze will make a 'respectable decision' amid controversies about her political intentions.

Zurabishvili said as the 'warrant of protection of the constitution', the president has no authority to dismiss members of the High Council of Justice.

However, she said, 'a person, holding such an important and responsible position', should understand herself where the line goes between the political activities and her current obligations as the council member (*Civil.ge, June 20, 2020*).

#### **21. Strasbourg Court accepts cases of Georgian journalists injured in June 20 rally dispersal**

The European Court of Human Rights has accepted applications prepared by the Human Rights Centre (HRC), asking the Prosecutor General's Office to grant plaintiff status to journalists injured during the dispersal of June 20-21, 2019 protest demonstrations near the parliament of Georgia.

A rally triggered by the presence of Russian MP Sergey Gavrillov in the Georgian parliament was dispersed by police after demonstrators ignored the appeal of the Interior Ministry to obey law enforcers and decided to break into the parliament building (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2020*).

#### **22. Peaceful rally held commemorating June 20 events**

A two-hour peaceful rally in front of the parliament of Georgia in downtown Tbilisi commemorating the one-year anniversary of June 20 protest, has ended.

The participants of the demonstration – civic activists and politicians – denounced Russian occupation, spoke of the last year's police dispersal and called on everyone to go to upcoming parliamentary elections (*Agenda.ge, June 20, 2020*).

#### **23. On anniversary of June 20 events, US Embassy stands with Georgian people's call to end Russian aggression, strengthen democracy**

One year after the June 20 protest, triggered by the presence of Russian MP Sergey Gavrillov in the Georgian parliament, the United States Embassy to Georgia stands with the Georgian people and their call to end Russian aggression and strengthen Georgia's democracy.

The US Embassy said June 20 marks one year since 'thousands marched on Rustaveli Avenue to protest Russia's continued occupation of Georgian territory' (*Agenda.ge, June 20, 2020*).

### **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **24. Q1 of 2020: Georgian economy grows 2.2%**

Nominal gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to 11.06 billion GEL in the first quarter of 2020 in Georgia, while GDP grew by 2.2 per cent year-over-year and the GDP deflator increased by 6.1 per cent

in the reporting period, show the latest data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2020*).

#### **25. Asian Development Bank praises Georgia's response to pandemic, notes unique opportunity for new era of economic growth**

ADB Country Director for Georgia Shane Rosenthal has praised Georgia's response to the coronavirus pandemic, noting its low infection rate in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

As Georgia's economy gradually restarts, it has a unique opportunity to initiate a new era of growth that is more diversified and inclusive," said Rosenthal.

He noted the country's early actions to combat the virus including health checks on incoming airline passengers and restrictions on movement.

He also praised the regulations of the National Bank of Georgia to stabilise the Georgian currency, the lari, and the postponement of repayment of loans by Georgian commercial banks. He noted that the Georgian government is trying to identify and help people who need it most, including pensioners over 70 (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2020*).

#### **26. Jan-May 2020: Georgian domestic exports down 16.2%**

Georgia exported locally produced goods worth \$1.23 billion in January-May 2020, which is 16.2 percent lower year-on-year, announces the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The share of domestic exports (export of locally produced goods and services, including those of foreign origin that have been substantially changed through local processing) in total exports constituted 72.3 per cent.

In the reporting period the share of the top 10 trading partners by domestic exports in the total domestic exports of Georgia amounted to 80.1 per cent (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2020*).

### **❖ Sports and Culture**

#### **27. Georgia to host Women's U18 World, U17 European Handball Championships**

Georgia will host two of International Handball Federation competitions in the next two years, with the 2021 IHF Women's Under 17 European Championship and the 2022 IHF Women's Under 18 World Championship coming to two cities in the country.

The Georgian Handball Federation received the right to host the events as the national governing body is gearing up to resume post-pandemic training sessions for the country's national teams in August (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2020*).

## **Additional Information**

**June 22, 2020**

### **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 3.0385 GEL

1 GBP - 3.7629 GEL

100 RUB - 4.3743 GEL

1 EUR - 3.4040 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4431 GEL

100 JPY - 2.8418 GEL

**Monday**

22 June



18° 31°

**Tuesday**

23 June



19° 33°

**Wednesday**

24 June



19° 35°

**Thursday**

25 June



18° 31°

**Friday**

26 June



17° 31°



**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](#)**