

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

June 22-24

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. UNHRC Passes Resolution on Occupied Georgian Regions

On June 22, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution titled "Cooperation with Georgia", highlighting human rights abuses in occupied Georgian territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

The resolution was endorsed at the 43rd session held in Geneva by 20 member states voting in favor, and 2 members (Cameroon and Venezuela) voting against, while 24 abstained from voting.

The Council raised "serious concern" that provisions of previously adopted resolutions with regard to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region "have not been implemented." (*Civil.ge, June 23, 2020*)

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

2. Tskhinvali Reports 1 New Case, Total Hits 84

Kremlin-backed authorities of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia registered one new case of COVID-19 infection, raising the total to 84 cases, "Res" news agency reported.

The last patient to be diagnosed with coronavirus infection is a cadet at a Russian military academy who has returned to Tskhinvali region, noted Anna Gagloeva, a public health "official." To date, there are 34 active cases in the occupied region (*Civil.ge, June 23, 2020*).

3. One New Case Recorded in Tskhinvali, Total Rises to 85

Kremlin-backed authorities of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia have registered one new case of coronavirus infection, raising the total to 85, according to "Res" news agency.

The last person to be diagnosed with COVID-19 is a student at Russian university who has returned to the occupied region (*Civil.ge, June 24, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. USS Porter Makes Port Call in Batumi

USS Porter (DDG-78) is making a port call to Batumi to conduct maritime security operations and enhance regional maritime stability, combined readiness, and naval capability with our NATO allies, US Embassy in Tbilisi reported today.

"Porter has routinely operated in the Black Sea over the past few years, demonstrating our continued commitment to security and stability in the region." said Cmdr. Craig Trent, commanding officer of USS Porter upon commencing his mission in the Black Sea in April 2020. Apart from Georgia, during this

deployment, USS Porter planned engagements with Turkish, Romanian and Bulgarian allies (*Civil.ge, June 23, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

5. NCDC Head: Current COVID-19 Situation Allows for Holding Parliamentary Vote as Scheduled

Amiran Gamkrelidze, Head of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, has told reporters today that current epidemiological situation in Georgia allows to hold parliamentary elections in October in compliance with public health guidelines.

However, Gamkrelidze noted that the overall situation remained “volatile” due to daily occurrence of new cases of infection, making difficult to make an accurate forecast “for the following four months.” (*Civil.ge, June 22, 2020*)

6. 3 New Cases, 5 Recoveries Reported

Georgia has reported three new cases of novel coronavirus, increasing the number of total confirmed cases to 917, according to StopCov.ge website. Meanwhile, five infected patients have recovered, taking the number of recoveries to 776 (*Civil.ge, June 25, 2020*).

7. Int’l Reactions as Electoral Reform Bill Clears First Hurdle

The Georgian Parliament voted overwhelmingly on June 21 to endorse constitutional amendments on first reading that foresee reforming current electoral system ahead of parliamentary elections due in October this year.

Passage of the electoral reform package, which was agreed on by the ruling Georgian Dream party and the opposition following talks facilitated by foreign diplomats, shortly prompted international assessments.

The U.S. Embassy, which played a significant role in brokering the March 8 Deal, congratulated Georgian lawmakers for approving the first reading of changes to the Constitution on Sunday. “It is an important step towards greater parliamentary pluralism,” the Embassy stated, while encouraging “all sides to fully implement the March 8 agreement.”

EU Envoy to Georgia Carl Hartzell, who also mediated the talks, welcomed initial approval of electoral changes. “I counted 142 votes behind the constitutional deal after March 8,” tweeted the Ambassador, highlighting that amendments were passed with 136 votes in favor. Hartzell expressed hope that “all sides will take responsibility” to ensure final approval of the bill.

Congressman Adam Kinzinger (R-Illinois), who co-chairs the U.S. House Georgia caucus, also hailed passing of the electoral reform bill despite the hindrances – “a long road, but well worth it,” the lawmaker wrote (*Civil.ge, June 22, 2020*).

8. CSOs Glad Electoral Reform Moves Ahead

On June 22, a group of six civil society outfits welcomed the passage of constitutional amendments in the first reading in a statement, which stressed the “full implementation of March 8 Agreement” is necessary for the amendments to become law.

The group expressed hope that “all political parties will assume responsibility to implement the March 8 Agreement and take reasonable steps towards promptly approving the changes in all three readings.” The watchdogs stressed that “improving the election system” in the run-up to 2020 polls was crucial for stable and democratic political environment. “Given current circumstances, voting in favor of the amendments was the only right decision – in the interests of the state,” the CSOs noted (*Civil.ge, June 22, 2020*).

9. Anna Dolidze Quits High Council of Justice amid Conflict-of-Interest Controversy

Anna Dolidze, a non-judge member of the High Council of Justice (HCoJ), has announced she will quit the Council – a state body overseeing the judiciary. She would hand in her resignation to the President later today.

Dolidze’s decision came after a group of seven civil society organizations, among others Transparency International Georgia, ISFED and Georgian Democracy Initiative released a joint statement on June 15, calling on Anna Dolidze to quit HCoJ in a “timely fashion”, after having announced plans to launch a political movement.

On May 21, Dolidze founded Movement for People, a political outfit, saying she was striving to shake up the political field in the country “with clean hands.” This led to mounting criticism, spearheaded by another non-judge member of HCoJ, Nazi Janezashvili, who said partisan politics were legally incompatible with the Council membership. Dolidze called Janezashvilis actions “a smear campaign” (*Civil.ge, June 22, 2020*).

10. Survey: Georgians Concerned about Political Influence on Courts

Nearly one-in-two Georgians consider that a “clan” – a handful of judges holding sway over their colleagues – exists in the judiciary, found a new survey commissioned by Transparency International Georgia, a local watchdog.

The opinion poll has demonstrated that Georgians are well aware of shortcomings plaguing the judiciary, TI Georgia said in a statement.

The survey was fielded by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), a pollster, from February 27 to March 18 through 1,763 nationwide interviews. The margin of error is in the region of 2.2%.

Out of 47% of respondents who say “a clan” is governing the judiciary, 88% say that judges affiliated with the “clan” must resign (*Civil.ge, June 23, 2020*).

11. Georgian Parliament Approves Constitutional Changes in Second Reading

On June 23, the Georgian Parliament endorsed constitutional amendments on electoral reform in the second reading with 115 votes in favor and 3 against. The bill cleared the first reading at a special parliamentary session on Sunday, June 21.

The constitutional changes foresee introducing a new composition of the legislative body 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 (*Civil.ge, June 23, 2020*).

12. CSOs Oppose MP Kiladze Nomination to UN Child Rights Committee

A group of 53 civil society outfits have opposed nomination of Sopio Kiladze, who chairs Parliament's Human Rights Committee, by the Government to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, citing her questionable track record and "opaque" selection procedures.

In a statement released on June 22, prominent watchdogs, including GYLA, TI Georgia, EMC and others, voiced concerns about Kiladze "showing homophobic prejudices," and disregarding issues raised by minority groups during her tenure.

The group said the Georgian government picked Kiladze as its candidate behind closed doors – through a process that "lacked transparency" and "did not engage civil society groups."

They also cast doubt on Kiladze's impartiality and pointed to potential conflict of interests as Kiladze is an MP from the ruling party and, to date, she sits on Georgian Dream's political council (*Civil.ge, June 24, 2020*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

13. Central Bank Cuts Key Rate by 0.25 Basis Points to 8.25%

On June 24, the National Bank of Georgia reduced its benchmark interest rate by 0.25 basis points to 8.25% to help the economy in recession due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Monetary Policy Committee of NBG lowered the lending rate while the Bank saw the annual inflation reach 6.5% in May.

The NBG forecasts that inflation will continue to gradually decline over the rest of the year and it is expected to hit the target level of 3% in the first half of 2021.

Increase in costs of supply of some goods and services due to COVID-19 containment measures was a one-off, the Central Bank said (*Civil.ge, June 24, 2020*).

14. Finance Ministry Sells GEL 80 Mln Benchmark Bonds

On June 23, the Ministry of Finance of Georgia sold 5-year benchmark bonds worth GEL 80 million (USD 24.4 million) at the Treasury Bill Auction, according to the National Bank of Georgia (NBG).

The Central Bank reported that a total of eleven commercial banks bidded at the auction. The overall demand reached GEL 167 million (USD 51,1 million).

Minimum yield equaled 8.53%, maximum yield stood at 8.73%, and the weighted average yield was in the region of 8.668% (*Civil.ge, June 24, 2020*).

15. Georgian parliament approves anti-crisis budget for 2020

The Georgian parliament has approved the anti-crisis budget, which reflects additional necessary expenditures of 3.4 billion GEL needed to combat the coronavirus and treat patients, the Georgian Ministry of Finance announces.

- The budget allocations according to the anti-crisis plan consisted of the following:
- 450 million GEL in compensation to citizens who lost their jobs due to the pandemic
- 75 million GEL for one-time assistance in the amount of 300 GEL
- 170 million GEL for utility bills
- 24 million GEL for the assistance of persons with disabilities
- 60 million GEL for healthcare infrastructure






- 285 million GEL will be spent to treat and prevent the coronavirus
- 250 million GEL for reduction of income tax for the purpose of maintaining jobs
- 45 million GEL to subsidise flights and for quarantine services
- 330 million GEL to finance the credit guarantee programme
- 70 million GEL to subsidise interest expenses of the hotels
- 45 million GEL to exempt touristic facilities from the property tax
- 20 million GEL to issue small grants
- 40 million GEL to support the construction sector
- 139 million GEL to support the agriculture sector
- 600 million GEL for VAT returns
- 600 million GEL to create long-term liquidity for commercial banks (*Agenda.ge, June 25, 2020*)








Additional Information

June 25, 2020

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 3.0556 GEL	1 GBP - 3.8278 GEL	100 RUB - 4.4222 GEL
1 EUR - 3.4528 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4456 GEL	100 JPY - 2.8686 GEL

Thursday 25 June	Friday 26 June	Saturday 27 June	Sunday 28 June	Monday 29 June
				
18° 31°	18° 29°	15° 22°	15° 26°	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](#)**