

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

July 10-13

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Date: **July 14, 2020**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

1. Georgia: Russian Occupation Forces Shoot, Detain Georgian Citizen

The Georgian State Security Service said on July 11 that the representatives of "Russian occupation forces" have illegally detained a resident of village Kvemo Chala of Kaspi Municipality, adjacent to Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia occupation line.

SSG said the Russian occupation forces have shot and wounded the person in the foot before illegally detaining him.

The State Security Service said Hot Line has been immediately activated over "this grave incident carried out by the Russian occupation forces," adding that the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), as well as co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, have been informed (*Civil.ge, July 11, 2020*).

2. Georgian MFA Decries Shooting, Detaining its Citizen by Russia's Occupation Forces

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia said on July 11 that it "categorically condemns" the fact of shooting, wounding, and illegal detention of a Georgian citizen by the Russian occupation forces, as another dangerous provocation by the Russian Federation.

Georgian MFA said the fact that occurred near the Tskhinvali occupation line earlier on July 11 aimed at escalating and destabilizing the situation on the ground in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic (*Civil.ge, July 11, 2020*).

3. U.S. Embassy Condemns 'Provocative Actions' by Russian Occupation Forces

U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi said on July 12 that it is "alarmed and deeply troubled by reports that Russian-led security forces shot, wounded, and detained a Georgian citizen on July 11" along Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia occupation line.

"We condemn this shooting and detention — another escalation in a series of provocative actions taken by Russian-led forces in recent weeks," the Embassy stressed.

It added that "such a dangerous and unwarranted incident would not have occurred if Russia had fulfilled its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement, including withdrawing its forces to pre-conflict positions and allowing unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance."

Calling for the immediate release of the detained Georgian, the Embassy said the U.S. "remains resolute in its support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"It is imperative, particularly for the safety of civilians, that Russia halt its destabilizing actions, fulfill its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement, and cease its occupation of Georgia," the U.S. Embassy concluded (*Civil.ge, July 13, 2020*).

4. Tbilisi demands resumption of incident prevention meetings with Russian-occupied Tskinali

Tbilisi has demanded the resumption of Ergneti Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings amid the shooting and illegal detention of Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze by the de facto authorities of the Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region on July 11 (*Agenda.ge, July 13, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

5. US provides Georgian coast guards with modern communication equipment

Georgian coast guards have been provided with modern communication equipment thanks to financial support from the US Defense and Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). Radio and communication system equipment was given to Poti's Coast Guard Department today (*Agenda.ge, July 10, 2020*).

6. Norway offers €3.75 mln for Council of Europe's new Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023

Norway has pledged a multi-annual contribution of approximately €3.75 million to the Council of Europe's new Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023, announces the Council of Europe Office in Georgia. The Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023 aims to bring Georgia's legislation, institutions and practice further in line with European standards in the areas of human rights, rule of law and democracy.

The action plan is intended to support the country's efforts to honour its obligations as a Council of Europe member state.

Under this action plan, the Council of Europe and the Georgian authorities have agreed to:

- Implement reforms aiming to enhance the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case-law at national level
- Align national legislation and practice of anti-discrimination with European standards
- Promote gender equality
- Enhance the independence and accountability of the judicial system
- Improve the electoral legislation and practice
- Reform the penitentiary system
- Enhance information security
- Advance the compliance of national practices with European standards in the field of media and internet
- Improve the quality of local democracy
- Enhance the protection of economic and social rights
- Develop capacity of law enforcement and other agencies to respond to juvenile crimes, further develop youth policies
- Effectively prevent and counter trafficking in human beings, facilitate transition of young legal professions to work
- Facilitate civil society participation in decision making at all levels
- Increase dialogue and confidence building between divided communities (*Agenda.ge, July 10, 2020*).

7. 15% of U.S. Aid to Georgia Govt Conditioned on Rights and Liberties

The U.S. House Appropriations Committee on July 9 approved the fiscal year 2021 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill on a vote of 29 to 21. The legislation, funding international programs and activities of the U.S., recommends not less than USD 132,025,000 assistance for Georgia, with 15 % of the funds available to the Georgian Government conditioned to the state of democracy in Georgia.

Referring to withholding 15% of assistance funds made available to the central Georgian Government, the bill says that the Secretary of State shall consider whether the Government of Georgia is taking effective steps to:

- effectively implementing electoral reform;
- respecting the independence of the judiciary, including from legislative or executive interference;
- effectively implementing the necessary policies to ensure accountability and transparency, including unfettered access to public information;
- protecting the rights of civil society, opposition political parties, and the independence of the media; and
- limiting the informal influence of oligarchs over functions of government and the application of laws and regulations (*Civil.ge, July 10, 2020*).

8. European Commission on Georgia's Fulfillment of Visa Liberalization Requirements

On July 10, the European Commission has released its assessment of the fulfillment of visa liberalization requirements by Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, including Georgia.

The report highlighted that while Georgia has put in place concrete measures to address irregular migration to the Schengen+ area and crime-related challenges, the country needs further immediate action to address these challenges, in particular the increasing numbers of unfounded asylum applications.

Noting that for the third year in a row, Georgia continued to be the main country of origin of asylum applicants among visa-free Eastern Partnership countries, the report says the number of applications lodged by Georgian nationals in the Schengen+ area increased by 9%, with 21,570 applications lodged in 2019 compared to 19,730 applications submitted in 2018.

The report noted that the asylum recognition rate decreased to 4.1% in 2019 compared to 4.7% in 2018; in the first quarter of 2020, 3,795 asylum applications were reported, which is 42% less than in the same period of 2019 (*Civil.ge, July 10, 2020*).

9. Georgian CSOs Submit Universal Periodic Review to UN Human Rights Council

The coalition of Georgian civil society organizations, comprised of Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC), Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) and Partnership for Human Rights (PHR) submitted on July 8 a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to the United Nations Human Rights Council, analyzing the state of implementation of social and economic rights by the Government of Georgia.

The document, covering the period between 2015 and 2020, reviews several issues, including rights to adequate housing; work and employment; social rights of children; and reproductive and sexual health of women with disabilities (*Civil.ge, July 13, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

10. 28 Georgian Servicemen Repatriated after Testing COVID-19 Positive in Afghanistan

The Georgian Defense Ministry reported on July 10 that 28 Georgian servicemen, on rotation in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, have tested positive for the novel coronavirus. The Ministry of Defense identified local Afghan personnel as the source of their infection.

According to the Ministry, their mission was cut short and all were repatriated by the German Air Force. The Ministry said all of the infected servicemen feel well. The servicemen continue their treatment at the Gori military hospital in Georgia's eastern region of Shida Kartli (*Civil.ge, July 10, 2020*).

11. Georgia Reports 9 New Cases; Active Cases Rise to 123

Georgia reports nine new cases of COVID-19, taking the tally of total confirmed cases in the country to 995. The number of active cases to date stands at 123 (*Stopcov.ge, July 13, 2020*).

12. No more than 200 people to be allowed at open air events in Georgia

Georgia is allowing open air cultural events to resume starting today, though is restricting the amount of people that can attend to no more than 200 people.

Open air exhibitions and all other types of outdoor activities are also allowed starting today, in addition to holding rehearsals in closed spaces.

[Allowing the holding of open air cultural events] is important especially in the summer, when domestic tourism is becoming more active," said Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia on July 9. Georgia resumed domestic tourism on June 15 (*Civil.ge, July 13, 2020*).

13. Mayor of Kharagauli Municipality Resigns

Nikoloz Topuridze, Mayor of Kharagauli Municipality in Georgia's western Imereti region, has announced about his decision to resign, noting that he remains in the governing Georgian Dream party. Topuridze wrote on his Facebook page that he had made the decision several months ago, but stayed on the post upon the request of the governor and the team amid the coronavirus pandemic. He did not, however, clarify the reasons behind his decision.

Nikoloz Topuridze will file a resignation to the Kharagauli Sakrebulo later today. He will be replaced by his deputy, Teimuraz Chkheidze (*Civil.ge, July 13, 2020*).

14. Following TV Exposure, Prosecutor's Office Charges MP's Son, Five Others, for Violent Assault

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia announced on July 13 that Davit Kobaladze, son of Georgian Dream MP Koba Kobaladze, and five others have been charged with violence and inflicting grave injuries to a man identified as G.E.

The police arrested the six persons, including Kobaladze, on July 11 – some 17 days after the incident, only after opposition-leaning TV Pirveli channel announced that the son of the Georgian Dream's "influential lawmaker" also participated in the incident.

In a statement released today, the Prosecutor's Office stated that Kobaladze and five others assaulted a young man for revenge in the Saburtalo district of Tbilisi. The prosecution said four persons beat G.E. and the two others – identified as S.K. and G. K. – wounded him using sharp objects (*Civil.ge, July 13, 2020*).

15. Libertarian Girchi party to raffle away Tesla car if it enters parliament

Girchi, a libertarian party well-known for its outlandish demonstrations and campaigns, says it will raffle away a Tesla car for voters who come out for the October parliamentary elections and if the party makes it over the 1% threshold into parliament.

The party says that the goal of the step is to encourage voters to participate in the upcoming, October parliamentary elections which will be conducted in a different manner, allowing parties or election blocs to enter the legislative body if they receive just one per cent of votes (*Agenda.ge, July 13, 2020*).

16. Bill passed in final reading on electronic surveillance to prevent domestic violence

The Georgian parliament has passed a bill in its third and final reading today which allows for the use of electronic surveillance to prevent domestic violence.

The bill, which was voted on by 79 MPs in the 150-member parliament, says that possible perpetrators of domestic violence and their targets will have to wear electronic surveillance bracelets for one month if there is a high chance of repeated violence (*Agenda.ge, July 13, 2020*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

17. Georgia's Foreign Trade in January-June 2020

Georgia's foreign trade turnover in the first six months of 2020 decreased by 16.3%, compared to the same period last year – reaching USD 5.1 billion, according to the preliminary figures released by the National Statistics Office (Geostat) on July 13.

Exports from Georgia decreased by 15.6% year-on-year to USD 1.5 billion, while imports were down by 16.5% y/y to USD 3.6 billion in January-June, with trade gap standing at USD 2.1 billion (*Civil.ge, July 13, 2020*).

18. New route from Georgia's Kutaisi airport: Wizz Air Abu Dhabi to link Kutaisi to UAE capital starting October 1

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, a joint venture between the Hungarian budget airline and Abu Dhabi state holding company ADQ, will begin operations on October 1, with six new routes including the west Georgia city of Kutaisi.

For the first time in the history of Kutaisi International Airport, it will be possible to get to the Middle East by regular direct flights", reads a press release published by United Airports of Georgia.

Flights connecting Kutaisi to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, will be carried out two times a week.

Director of the United Airports of Georgia Tamar Archuadze said that adding the new route from Kutaisi airport proves that WizzAir has long-term plans on the Georgian market (*Agenda.ge, July 11, 2020*).

Additional Information

July 14, 2020

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD – 3.0614 GEL

1 GBP - 3.8568 GEL

100 RUB -4.3180 GEL

1 EUR - 3.4673 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4459 GEL

100 JPY - 2.8590 GEL

Tuesday
14 July



18° 31°

Wednesday
15 July



19° 33°

Thursday
16 July



21° 31°

Friday
17 July



21° 31°

Saturday
18 July



22° 34°



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](#)