

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

August 17-19

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Abkhaz Opposition Speaks against Detente with Tbilisi, Gali Passportization

Recent comments by the Moscow-backed leaders in Abkhazia on possibilities of cooperation with Tbilisi, as well as the issue of citizenship in ethnic-Georgian Gali district, were met with harsh criticism from local opposition groups.

"Aruaa" – an influential union of Abkhaz war veterans – released a statement on August 17, saying that Aleksander Ankvab's August 13 comment, in which he deemed denying Abkhaz passports to Gali Georgians as unfair, bred resentment "among all patriotic forces of the country."

The organization slammed Ankvab over bringing the citizenship problem into "ethnic dimension" and accused him of defying the "Abkhaz legislation", and neglecting the rights of other nationalities residing in Abkhazia while advocating exclusively for the rights of Georgian nationals (*Civil.ge, August 17, 2020*).

2. Abkhazia's Shamba Reiterates Calls for Dialogue with Tbilisi

Sergei Shamba, former foreign minister of Abkhazia, who now serves as the head of the security council of the occupied region, reiterated calls for dialogue with Tbilisi, highlighting that "in order to resolve conflict with Georgia we need dialogue."

Shamba said although there are issues – including "sovereignty and independence" of Abkhazia – where compromise is not possible, there are "many other issues" that require solutions.

He named the signing of the Treaty on the Non-Resumption of War, the opening of the transit of goods through Abkhazia, reopening of the airport in Sokhumi as the possible negotiable issues with Tbilisi.

As a long-serving diplomat and politician "I know that if there is a conflict, we need to talk," Shamba went on, adding in response to angry Abkhaz opposition that "I cannot understand the logic of those who say that there is a conflict and we do not need to talk." (*Civil.ge, August 20, 2020*)

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

3. Tskhinvali Investigates Attempted Murder of Interior Minister

Moscow-backed authorities in Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia said they launched an investigation into the attempted murder of interior minister Igor Naniev, whose car was fired on by unidentified persons in downtown Tskhinvali on August 17. No one has been injured, local media stated, citing the authorities.

The investigation has been launched under articles 277 and 222 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation – encroachment on the life of a statesman and illegal acquisition of firearms, respectively (*Civil.ge, August 18, 2020*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Former NATO general Breedlove: Nobody has contributed to NATO more than Georgia

No nation has contributed more to NATO efforts than Georgia, retired four-star general Philip Mark Breedlove told Voice of America in an interview about the alliance, the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia and more.

The Georgian edition of the broadcaster recorded the interview with the former United States Air Force general on Monday, going over the 2008 conflict and Russia's interests in it, as well as Georgian Defence Forces' contributions to NATO peacekeeping missions and Breedlove's personal reflections on Georgian troops.

In the talk the American general - who led the US European Command and served as the Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO Allied Command Operations between 2013-2016 - was unequivocal in his recognition of Georgia's share in the alliance (*Agenda.ge, August 18, 2020*).

5. Georgian MFA Says Ambassador Urgently Returned to Minsk

Responding to media speculations the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia clarified that due to events unfolding in Belarus the Georgian Ambassador Valeri Kvaratskhelia had to immediately return to Minsk. The Ministry added, that since the flights to Belarus are restricted due to the pandemic, it was decided to use the government-owned aircraft.

Several Georgian media outlets reported that the popular flight control websites registered a flight of the government-owned aircraft to Minsk and back on Sunday, August 16. As no official explanations were forthcoming, Mtavari TV speculated that the flight from Minsk brought to Tbilisi the son of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, embattled Belarusian leader. Others have alleged that the Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili, and/or Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani might have flown to the Belarusian capital. "The Republic of Belarus is a friendly country, with whom Georgia enjoys close relations in both bilateral, as well as Eastern Partnership format," Georgian MFA stated today (*Civil.ge, August 18, 2020*).

6. Ukrainian Defense Minister Visits Tbilisi

On August 19, in his first official visit as the Defense Minister of Ukraine, Andrii Taran visited Tbilisi and discussed the issues of bilateral defense cooperation with Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Garibashvili. The two ministers signed the Program of Cooperation between the Ministries of Defense of Ukraine and Georgia for 2020.

"The agreements we have reached will help strengthen defense capabilities of our countries, increase operational and combat capabilities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Defense Forces of Georgia," noted Minister Taran (*Civil.ge, August 19, 2020*).

❖ Internal Affairs

❖ Covid-19 related news

7. Economy minister: restoring more flights depends on virus situation

Restoring more international flights after the first arrivals since the lockdown earlier this month will depend on the situation with the pandemic in Georgia, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava told reporters on Monday.

Turnava told the press the situation with the virus was changing in partner states with whom Georgia has had flights, and that her government would make decisions on restoring the connections based on health risks for citizens.

The minister cited "potentially major damage" caused by "heedless steps" made during the outbreak while explaining the government's efforts to "preserve the efficiency in combating the pandemic" (*Agenda.ge, August 17, 2020*).

8. Tents to be placed on Batumi Boulevard to offer voluntary coronavirus testing

Tents will be set up on the Batumi Boulevard where tourists and locals will be able to undergo voluntary coronavirus testing, announces Head of the National Disease Control Centre (NCDC) Amiran Gamkrelidze.

Gamkrelidze also said that the number of nightclubs, bungalows and staff working there will be determined in the Adjara region, mainly in Kobuleti and Batumi in order to start mandatory testing from tomorrow.

He said that the fact that five people are infected with Covid-19 from the Club Havana in Kobuleti is 'worthy of attention' and that in general 'we need to be more attentive' (*Agenda.ge, August 19, 2020*).

9. Seroprevalence study on coronavirus to be conducted in four municipalities in Georgia

A seroprevalence study will be conducted in four municipalities in Georgia to examine the presence of Covid-19 in the country and determine whether residents of the municipalities have been infected with the virus in recent months but went below the radar of the healthcare system or were asymptomatic. The four municipalities will be Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Martvili and Borjomi.

Researchers will take blood samples from 1,200 people and determine whether they have immunoglobulin G, the presence of which confirms that they have already had the virus (*Agenda.ge, August 19, 2020*).

10. WHO Director-General praises Georgia's coronavirus response

Ambassador of Georgia to the UN Office in Geneva Alexandre Maisuradze and Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus have discussed the current coronavirus situation in Georgia and the measures taken by the Georgian government in response to the coronavirus crisis at today's meeting, announces the Georgian Foreign Ministry.

"The WHO Director-General praised Georgia's coronavirus situation and noted that the country is exemplary not only for the fight against COVID-19, but also for introducing a universal healthcare programme, as well as combating Hepatitis C and fulfilling obligations under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control", stated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Agenda.ge, August 19, 2020*).

❖ Other news

11. Opposition parties in Georgia adopt joint declaration on elections

About 30 opposition parties in Georgia have adopted a joint declaration on the upcoming October elections at a meeting held in the office of the Labour Party today.

The declaration reads that 'Georgia's democratic opposition agrees that Ivanishvili's oligarchic government poses the greatest challenge to the country and its democratic development'.

Ivanishvili and his party are doing their best to spread nihilism in society, to discredit the entire political process. Under these conditions, our most important task is to strengthen public trust and support for the elections, which is a peaceful way of changing the government, the only right way to enable our society to take firm steps towards a western democratic state", reads the declaration.

The declaration further says the Ivanishvili regime has 'mobilised a large part of both administrative and financial resources', and state institutions serve the interests of the ruling team instead of the public (*Agenda.ge, August 18, 2020*).

12. Opposition Name Remaining Two Joint Majoritarian Candidates for Tbilisi

Following a meeting at the Labor Party office on August 18, the opposition parties, all signatories to the March 8 Deal on election reform, named joint candidates to run in two remaining single-mandate constituencies in the capital city of Tbilisi for the upcoming October parliamentary elections.

The opposition parties will support Zurab Japaridze, the leader of right-libertarian Girchi party, in Didube-Chugureti majoritarian district, and recently pardoned former Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili, leader of Victorious Georgia party, in Saburtalo district.

- The major opposition groups named six joint candidates for the capital city earlier:
- Shalva Shavgulidze of Free Democrats in Mtatsminda-Krtsanisi;
- Elene Khoshtaria of European Georgia in Vake district;
- Nika Melia of the United National Movement (UNM) in Gldani;
- Giorgi Vashadze of New Georgia in Isani;
- Levan Khabeishvili of UNM in Samgori;
- Shalva Natelashvili of Labor Party in Nadzaladevi.

Despite the agreement Giorgi Vashadze from New Georgia has established his independent movement, although he attends meetings with the representatives of the oppositional parties. Therefore, United National Movement is considering nominating candidate in Isani District (*Civil.ge, Mtavari Arkhi, August 19-20, 2020*).

13. Solidarity Alliance of Georgia Names Majoritarian Candidates in Tbilisi

The Solidarity Alliance of Georgia party, established recently by former members of the ruling Georgian Dream party, named its majoritarian candidates for all of the eight single-mandate constituencies in Tbilisi on August 17.

- Jaba Jishkariani, Tbilisi Sakrebulo member, for Mtatsminda-Krtsanisi
- MP Beka Natsvlishvili, for Vake district
- MP Levan Gogichaishvili for Saburtalo district
- MP Gedevan Popkhadze for Didube-Chugureti district
- MP Ramaz Bluashvili for Isani district
- Zviad Tavadze for Nadzaladevi district
- Sandro Rizhamadze for Samgori district
- Lasha Giorgadze for Gldani district

At an event held in central Tbilisi's Vere Park, the party promised to increase the minimum wage to GEL 500 (USD 162); to halve 20% income tax for persons with income less than GEL 1,000; to develop industry and agriculture; and to increase state investments in education, science, and culture sectors (*Civil.ge, August 18, 2020*).

14. Lelo Presents Team to Run for Adjara Supreme Council Elections

On August 17, Lelo for Georgia – party established by TBC Bank founders Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze – presented its team to run through party list and majoritarian ballots in the Adjara Supreme Council elections.

An incomplete party list of persons, with three women and ten men, includes:

- Giorgi Tavartkiladze – financier
- Vazha Darchia – scientist and civic activist
- Maka Tsintsadze – lawyer
- Mikheil Kavtaradze – lawyer
- Giorgi Darchia – architect
- Zviad Diasamidze – historian
- Eka Davitadze – an expert in mass communications
- Gocha Zhgenti – traumatologist who also has a degree in forest engineering
- Raul Paksadze – traumatologist
- Sabri Brunjadze – psychologist
- Ivane Pirtskhaleishvili – economist
- Davit Mamuladze – allergist
- Gulnara Abashidze – a medical doctor (*Civil.ge, August 18, 2020*)

15. Head of Georgian Public Broadcaster Resigns

Vasil Maghlaperidze resigned from his post as the Director General of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB).

In his statement of August 18, Maghlaperidze named possible doubts and questions around the impartiality of GPB in the face of the upcoming parliamentary elections as the primary reason behind his resignation.

"Although I am fully convinced that the 1st Channel will report upcoming elections and all other political processes impartially and without bias, considering that some might still call the impartiality of the channel into question for various purposes, I have decided to resign," the former Head noted.

Maghlaperidze denied media speculations that his resignation may be connected to his return to politics. He said he will continue to work for "TV-School" – a project run by the GPB to fill the gaps caused by the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic (*Civil.ge, August 18, 2020*).

16. CEC Cybersecurity Server Center Opened

On August 17, the Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC) hosted an opening of a new Cybersecurity Server Center. The newly equipped center will help the Election Commission to "maximally mitigate cybersecurity-related risks."

The server center was equipped in partnership with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), an implementing partner of USAID's Elections and Political Processes program.

CEC Chairwoman Tamar Zhvania, who was joined by U.S. Ambassador to Kelly C. Degnan and USAID Mission Director Peter Wiebler, said that the U.S. has been a longstanding reliable partner and its support for the CEC was not limited to this project.

"We will certainly continue that close cooperation with the CEC to ensure that Georgians can go to the ballot box in October with confidence in their CEC and electoral process," Ambassador Degnan highlighted (*Civil.ge*, August 18, 2020).

17. NDI Assesses Pre-Election Environment Ahead of October Polls

On August 19, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) released the assessment of the pre-election environment in Georgia, addressing a variety of issues related to the upcoming October parliamentary elections and making 30 recommendations to improve Georgia's electoral process.

The report notes that although Georgia "has taken important steps forward to ensure greater women's political participation and has laid out a concrete path toward fulfilling promises of a fully proportional electoral system," "persistent issues related to electoral integrity have remained unaddressed, fueling polarization and detracting from public confidence in election outcomes."

According to NDI President Derek Mitchel, the foundations for democratic elections are present, "yet without some demonstrable improvements, a pattern of declining public confidence will continue."

Uneven Resources, Pandemic and Party Platforms

The pre-election assessment highlights that, due to uneven financial resources and access to media, the campaign will be dominated by the ruling Georgian Dream party and a handful of opposition parties.

Another important context is the global COVID-19 pandemic, which, according to the report, will potentially affect voter behavior.

Underrepresented Groups

As regards the inclusion of underrepresented groups, the report says that, despite some progress, "inclusion in electoral processes of underrepresented groups, including women, ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities, as well as members of the LGBTQI community, remains limited."

Media Environment, Information Space

The assessment brings up problems in the media environment as well, mentioning multiple legal challenges faced by government-critical TV channels that create "perceptions of politically motivated judicial interference in free expression" (*Civil.ge*, August 19, 2020).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

18. Geostat: 2019 FDI USD 1310.8 Million

Foreign direct investment in Georgia stood at USD 1310.8 million in 2019, a 0.3% year-on-year increase, according to final data released by the state statistics office, Geostat, on August 17.

The figure was revised upwards from Geostat's preliminary data released in March, which stood at USD 1.27 billion.

The financial sector received the largest share of FDI in 2019 – USD 272.1 million, down from 274.0 in 2018.

- The financial sector was followed by the energy sector with USD 261.6 million (which was more than a two-fold increase over the previous year);

- transport and communication – USD 126.8 million, (down from USD 163.1 mln in 2018);
- hotels and restaurants – USD 120.2 million,
- manufacturing – USD 115.3 million (down from USD 169.5 mln in 2018),
- mining – USD 52.4 million;
- construction – USD 35.3 million,
- health and social work – USD 13.5 million,
- real estate – USD 8.7 million, (drop from USD 130.7 million in 2018),
- other sectors – USD 304.9 million, up from USD 115.9 mln over the previous year.

Most of the FDI in 2019 came from companies registered in the United Kingdom and Turkey – USD 236.6 million and USD 175.3 million, respectively,

- followed by Ireland – USD 133.2 million;
- the U.S. – USD 111.5 million;
- the Netherlands – USD 100.4 million;
- Panama – USD 76.8 million;
- Luxembourg – USD 68.8 million;
- Russia – USD 54.4 million;
- China – USD 43.7 million,
- Japan – USD 39.5 million,
- other countries – USD 270.4 million (*Civil.ge, August 18, 2020*).

19. What were Georgia's main exports and imports in Jan-July 2020?

Copper ores and concentrates claimed first place in the list of top export items of Georgia, while motor cars were the top import commodity in January-July 2020, show preliminary data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The share of major commodity groups by export value was as follows:

- Copper ores and concentrates - \$391.3 million (22.3 per cent of total exports)
- Motor cars - \$198.5 million (11.3 per cent)
- Ferroalloys \$130.1 million (7.4 per cent)
- The top import commodities in January-July 2020 by value were:
- Motor cars - \$383.4 million (9 per cent of the total imports)
- Copper ores and concentrates - \$290.8 million (6.8 per cent)
- Petroleum and petroleum oils - \$278.6 million (6.5 per cent)

In January-July 2020 the share of the top ten trading partners in the total external trade turnover of Georgia amounted to 70 per cent.

Georgia's top trading partners were:

- Turkey (\$843.3 million)
- Russia (\$702.1 million) and
- China (\$ 627.6 million)

Overall, Georgia's external trade turnover amounted to \$6.030 billion in January-July 2020, which is a decrease of 17.6 per cent compared to the same period of last year (*Agenda.ge, August 19, 2020*).

20. Economy Minister: Swiss multinational biopharmaceutical company is ready to invest in Georgia

Swiss multinational biopharmaceutical company Ferring Pharmaceuticals is ready to invest in Georgia, said Georgian Economy Minister Natia Turnava earlier today after speaking with Per Falk, the president of Ferring Pharmaceuticals. The head of the company praised the attractive investment environment in Georgia.

"We are doing our best to attract foreign investors," said Turnava.

Turnava noted that the company is one of the greatest pharmaceutical companies in its own country and is amongst the largest 50 pharmaceutical companies in the world (*Agenda.ge, August 18, 2020*).

21. Over 1,200 tourists visited Georgia between Jul 22 – Aug 15

A total of 1,236 tourists visited Georgia between July 22 – August 15, announces Head of the Georgian Tourism Administration Mariam Kvrivishvili.

Kvrivishvili said that this figure includes Georgian citizens who have dual citizenship in 14 countries or have the right of long-term residence.

However, we can say for sure that more than 90 per cent of the visitors are citizens of foreign countries who visit our country for tourism purposes", said Kvrivishvili.






Kvrivishvili also said that foreign citizens entering Georgia undergo PCR testing on a selective basis and the results are negative (*Agenda.ge, August 19, 2020*).








Additional Information

August 20, 2020

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD – 3.0747 GEL	1 GBP - 4.0634 GEL	100 RUB -4.1887 GEL
1 EUR - 3.6702 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4167 GEL	100 JPY - 2.9215 GEL

Thursday 20 August	Friday 21 August	Saturday 22 August	Sunday 23 August	Monday 24 August
				
18° 31°	19° 32°	16° 26°	15° 25°	15° 24°

-  **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](#)**