

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

August 13-16

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Date: **August 17, 2020**

## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Abkhazia Reports 26 Cases, Record for Highest Daily Case Count

Moscow-backed authorities in Abkhazia have reported 26 COVID-19 cases, the highest number of daily cases since the pandemic outbreak. This brings the region's tally of total confirmed cases to 182.

In the meantime, eight patients have recovered, taking the number of recoveries to 66. The number of Abkhazia's active COVID-19 cases stands at 113 (*Civil.ge, August 14, 2020*).

#### 2. 7 New Cases, 3 Recoveries Reported in Abkhazia

Moscow-backed authorities in Abkhazia have reported that seven more patients have tested positive for coronavirus, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases in the region to 189. In the meantime, three more patients were discharged from the hospital, which increases the number of recoveries to 69. The number of active cases in the region to date stands at 117.

Occupied region's health ministry also reported that one of the patients, Abkhaz citizen, was "transferred abroad" for treatment (*Civil.ge, August 16, 2020*).

#### 3. Georgia Bids Farewell to 13 Abkhazia War Victims

Dozens gathered at the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi on August 15 to honor the remains of 13 persons, who have been missing since the 1992-93 war in Abkhazia and whose bodies were recently transferred from the region.

Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia paid tribute to the victims together with other cabinet ministers, voiced his condolences to the families and expressed gratitude to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Prime Minister also thanked the 'Abkhaz brothers' for their assistance.

The remains reportedly include 8 military personnel and 5 civilians. Two of the soldiers have been laid to rest today at the Tbilisi's Dighomi Cemetery with full military honors, while the other deceased have been entombed at the family cemeteries across the country (*Civil.ge, August 15, 2020*).

#### 4. Abkhazia's Ankvab: "Gali Georgians Are Our Citizens"

Alexander Ankvab, head of government in Russian-occupied Abkhazia told Sokhumi-based Apsnypress media outlet on August 13 that "we consider all Georgians living in Abkhazia, who did not fight against us as our citizens."

Ankvab noted that "we consider it unfair to deprive them of their Abkhaz passports. This is our internal affair."

Ankvab's comments came in response to Voice of America's recent piece which focused, among others, on Abkhaz security council head Sergei Shamba's statements on the citizenship issue in ethnic Georgian majority Gali district in Abkhazia.

According to the statistical data available in Sokhumi, as of 2018, 30,259 persons – with their absolute majority being ethnic Georgians – lived in Gali district. Sokhumi stripped the majority of them off ‘Abkhaz citizenship’ in 2014 and in 2017 and started issuing residence permits to them, depriving Gali residents of their political rights (*Civil.ge, August 15, 2020*).

#### **5. Paata Zakareishvili – Current Government of Abkhazia has “constructive” approach towards Tbilisi**

Former Georgian Reconciliation Minister Paata Zakareishvili had commented on the statement of Ankhab, who suggested that current Abkhaz leadership is known for its “constructive” attitude towards Tbilisi.

Responding to Zakareishvili, Ankhab said, “none of the former and current leadership of Abkhazia has ever called for a war with Georgia but for agreements on the non-resumption of hostilities towards a peaceful neighborhood,” adding that “we are talking about this now. Abkhazia will not discuss the issue of its independence with anyone.”

“[And if these two firm positions] – citizenship in Gali and non-resumption of war with Tbilisi – “are viewed by someone as a ‘constructive attitude’, then they are right,” Abkhaz government head maintained.

Ankhab slammed Zakareishvili’s statement – which suggested that current Abkhaz leadership is “less pro-Russian” than predecessor Khajimba’s administration – as “ridiculous.”

“There were no such leaders in the Abkhaz political space, and there are none. This fully applies to president Bzhania, Ankhab, Shamba, and Khajimba,” Ankhab underscored (*Civil.ge, August 15, 2020*).

#### **6. Georgian Leaders Mark 28 Years Since Abkhazia War Outbreak**

Georgian leaders on August 14 marked the 28th anniversary of the launch of a 13-month long armed conflict in Abkhazia in 1992.

Gela Giorgadze and Irakli Gogiberidze, President Salome Zurbishvili’s advisors in defense and security, and conflict affairs, respectively, took part in a wreath-laying ceremony at Tbilisi’s Heroes Square on behalf of the Georgian President.

Defense Minister Irakli Garibashvili, who laid wreaths at the memorial of Georgian fallen soldiers together with newly-appointed Reconciliation Minister Tea Akhveliani, said, “occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region is a common tragedy for Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians.”

“This – [Russian occupation] – is not a permanent process, and it will end with a peaceful de-occupation. We are well aware of the price of peace, and believe that reuniting Georgia through peaceful means has no alternative,” Minister Garibashvili added (*Civil.ge, August 15, 2020*).

### **❖ Foreign Affairs**

#### **7. New Estonian Ambassador presents credentials to Georgian Foreign Minister**

Estonia’s new ambassador to Georgia Riina Kaljurand has presented her credentials to the Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani.

“I’m very happy and very honoured to be appointed as an ambassador of Estonia to Georgia because I love this country and I like these people very much”, Riina Kaljurand said on August 13.

Noting that Estonia and Georgia have "a very special relationship" Ambassador Kaljurand said she is sure Estonia can further contribute to very many areas in Georgia with its expertise (*Agenda.ge*, August 14, 2020).

#### **8. Ombudswoman: Georgia must not extradite Ukrainian combatant to Russia**

Georgian Public Defender Nino Lomjaria has appealed to the country's Prosecutor's Office not to request the Ukrainian citizen Vadim Altman to be extradited to Russia.

A Georgian court examines an extradition request for an individual after the appeal of the Prosecutor's Office.

Russia accuses Altman of forming an illegal armed group and drug crimes and demanded his extradition in January 2020.

Lomjaria says that Altman participated in the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict and he is likely to become a subject of ill-treatment if extradited to Russia (*Agenda.ge*, August 14, 2020).

#### **9. Georgia among 'green' countries from which Israeli citizens may return to Israel without quarantine**

Georgia is among the 'green' countries from which Israelis may return home without having to go into 14-days mandatory quarantine, announced Minister of Transport of Israel Miri Regev who set August 16 as the target date for reopening, reports Israeli media outlet Globes.

The countries in this category were determined in accordance with the rate of infection with Covid-19 prevailing in them. The list of green countries will be revised once every two weeks. At this stage, the plan to reopen Israel's skies does not include entry for foreign citizens.

In addition to Georgia, Italy, the UK, Germany, Hong Kong, Jordan, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, Estonia, Canada, Rwanda, Denmark, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Greece and Austria are on the list of countries from which Israeli citizens may return to Israel without going into isolation (*Agenda.ge*, August 14, 2020).

#### **10. Pilot project kicks off in Adjara to address child lead exposure**

The Adjara government in western Georgia, with the support of UNICEF Georgia, has launched a pilot project to investigate the source of lead exposure in children between two and seven years of age.

The first nationwide survey last year revealed that 41 per cent of Georgian children have elevated blood levels of lead. Many of the children were from the coastal Adjara region.

The pilot project which will be carried out this year by Adjara Health Ministry aims to check blood levels of lead in pregnant women and women who breastfeed their children (*Agenda.ge*, August 14, 2020).

#### **11. Law enforcers detain three Nigerian citizens for fraud**

Law enforcers have detained three Nigerian citizens for fraud, says the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia.

The three individuals created a fake page on Facebook with the name of Frank Lucas Ballack and posed as a German citizen allegedly living in Georgia. They then gained the trust of US citizen D.K. through text messages on social media, promising her the imaginary Frank Ballack would travel to the U.S. and marry D.K. in the near future. D.K. was told 'Ballack' had won a \$900,000 tender to build bridges.

After a while, the recently detained called D.K. using the name of a Georgian doctor and said that Ballack had been caught in a car accident and needed money for treatment, so they asked D.K. to transfer money to Georgia, promising to return the money from the income of the tender.

D.K. sent \$233,250 to the bank accounts owned by O.P., P.CH., and O.M., who sent \$86,800 to their different bank accounts in Nigeria and Turkey. The crime is punishable from nine to 12 years in prison (*Agenda.ge, August 17, 2020*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### **12. Education Ministry Recommendations for Public Schools Ahead of New Academic Year**

New guidelines for public schools include:

- observing the one-meter distance between students;
- all persons except for students are required to wear face-mask;
- schools are required to have stocks of face-masks;
- cleaning restrooms after each and every break;
- half an hour break between shifts, in case schools work in shifts;
- arranging a special temporary isolation room for the students with virus symptoms;

Each school is entitled to decide individually the length of lessons, albeit the lessons should be no shorter than 30 minutes; The schools will now be allowed to commence study process at the most suitable time for them – 08:30, 08:45 or 09:00 (*Civil.ge, August 14, 2020*).

### **13. Gov't decreases quarantine, self-isolation time to 12 days**

***The decree, which is valid through December 30, 2020, also reads that:***

- Foreign citizens or people entering Tbilisi-controlled territory from the Russian-occupied regions, or individuals who had contact with COVID-19 patients will have to spend 12 days in quarantine.
- Individuals entering the country on official visits must present the results of a coronavirus test conducted in the preceding 72 hours. These individuals must be tested for the coronavirus every 72 hours over the course of 12 days.
- If a PCR test shows that an individual (on an official visit) has already had the coronavirus, he/she will be free from additional tests while in Georgia (*Agenda.ge, August 14, 2020*).

### **14. ISFED Speaks of Inauthentic Pro-Alliance of Patriots Campaign on Facebook**

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), a local watchdog, speaks of a large-scale coordinated information campaign being carried out on Facebook in favor of the Alliance of Patriots, "pro-Russian" nativist party that won six seats in the 2016 Parliament elections.

According to the report released on August 12, along with the Facebook page of Obiektivi TV channel, founded by party leader MP Irma Inashvili, the campaign is led by Tinp.ge online outlet, that poses as a real media outlet and the groups affiliated with it.

The report notes that ten "coordinated, discrediting" Facebook pages are also linked to the party, and their posts are alternately shared by "at least 12 authentic and fake accounts." The pages are run by Bakur Svanidze, known for his "anti-Western and pro-Russian sentiments."

ISFED said that the routine working manner of the said Facebook accounts creates an impression that persons behind them – disseminating the content on Svanidze's pages – are actually employed in the campaign.

According to the report, Svanidze's pages are mainly targeting opposition parties. At the same time, the pages also spread news stories discrediting the governing Georgian Dream party (*Civil.ge, August 14, 2020*).

#### **15. Rustavi 2 commissioned election polls: Ruling party to receive 52% of votes**

The election polls conducted by British company Survation, commissioned by Georgian Rustavi 2 TV channel, says that the Ruling Georgian Dream party will receive 52 per cent of votes in the October parliamentary elections.

The poll, which surveyed 1,200 people around the country between July 15 and July 24, gave the following results.

- Georgian Dream ruling party - 52%.
- United National Movement - 19 %.
- European Georgia - 8 %.
- Alliance of Patriots - 5 %.
- Lelo - 5 %.
- New Georgia - 4 %.
- Other parties - 7 %.

Per the constitutional amendments passed earlier this month, an election bloc or party which receives less than 40.54 per cent of votes in the proportional elections will not be able to form a government (*Agenda.ge, August 14, 2020*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **16. Georgia expects to harvest 50,000 tonnes of high quality hazelnuts**

About 50,000 tonnes of high quality hazelnuts are expected to be harvested in Georgia this year, announces the Ministry of Agriculture. Farmers in the Samegrelo region of Georgia have already started to gather the hazelnut harvest.

The Georgian Ministry of Agriculture said that farmers are expecting an exceptionally high quality harvest thanks to the Georgia Hazelnut Improvement Project that was launched in 2019 (*Agenda.ge, August 14, 2020*).

#### **17. New Law of Georgia on Entrepreneurs to come into force on January 1, 2021**

The government of Georgia has approved the Law on Entrepreneurs, that soon will be sent to the Parliament of Georgia and if approved will come into force on January 1, 2021, announces the Ministry of Justice of Georgia.

"The new law...has been developed to improve the business climate and aims to improve the legal framework, regulate internal corporate relations and, while promoting entrepreneurial freedom, increase transparency in this area. Also, the purpose of the bill is to bring Georgian legislation closer to European standards, to fulfill the requirements of the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia", reads the press-release published by the Ministry of Justice.

Once approved the new law will regulate issues related to the conflict of interest of business managers, the obligation of good faith, the fulfillment of obligations of the entrepreneurial community, reorganization and liquidation of the company (*Agenda.ge, August 14, 2020*).

### **18. July 2020: money transfers to Georgia up 22.1%**

The volume of money transfers to Georgia in July 2020 was \$188.7 million, which is a 22.1 per cent increase compared to July 2019, says the National Bank of Georgia (NBG).

More than one-third of money transfers came in from the European Union:

- EU countries - \$73.79 million (39.1%)
- Other countries - \$114.93 million (60.9%)

The largest countries from which money transfers entered Georgia were the following:

- Russia – \$40.4 million
- Italy – \$28.04 million
- USA – \$22.43 million
- Greece – \$20.22 million
- Israel – \$14.08

The vast majority (94.6%) of all money transfers from abroad came from 18 countries, with the volume of transfers from these countries each exceeding \$1 million last month (*Agenda.ge, August 14, 2020*).

### **19. Fitch affirms Georgia at 'BB' with negative outlook**

Global Fitch has confirmed Georgia's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BB' with a negative outlook.

Fitch notes in its recent report that Georgia's ratings are supported "by strong structural indicators" such as governance and business environment relative to 'BB' category peers.

"A consistent and credible policy framework has underpinned Georgia's resilience to previous shocks. These credit strengths are balanced by a high share of foreign-currency denominated government debt, low external liquidity and higher external financing requirements relative to peers", it says.

It also says that the negative outlook "reflects the significant impact" of the coronavirus pandemic on Georgia's economy.

"The pandemic is causing a sharp contraction of Georgia's small open economy with a large tourism sector, a deterioration in fiscal accounts, including markedly higher public debt, and increasing risks stemming from Georgia's higher external debt and wider structural current account deficit relative to the median of its 'BB' category peers", the report reads.

Fitch forecasts Georgia's economy to contract by 4.8% in 2020, with a rebound in growth of 4.5% in 2021.

"The continued closure of Georgia's land and air borders will have a significant impact on its tourism sector, which directly accounts for 11.6% of GDP (World Travel Tourism Council, 2019). A gradual recovery in tourism is anticipated in 2021, but it is unlikely to recover to 2019 levels by 2022", Fitch further says (*Agenda.ge, August 15, 2020*).

### **20. Georgia attracted \$1.31 bln in FDIs in 2019, UK top foreign investor**

Foreign direct investments (FDI) in Georgia amounted to \$1.31 billion in 2019, which is a 0.3 per cent increase compared to 2018, show the latest adjusted data of the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The top three countries that invested the most in Georgia in 2019 were:


- United Kingdom (18 %);
- Turkey (13.4 %);
- Ireland (10.2 %).


The reason behind Irelands activity on Georgian market can be explained by the deal between Adjarabet and Paddy Power Betfair, according to which 51% shares of Adjarabet goes to Irish company for 115.4 million Euros. Total FDI from Ireland is 133.3 million USD (*BPN.ge, August 17, 2020*).


### **Additional Information**


**August 17, 2020**  
**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**


1 USD - 3.0738 GEL	1 GBP - 4.0261 GEL	100 RUB - 4.1886 GEL
1 EUR - 3.6292 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4167 GEL	100 JPY - 2.8805 GEL








**Monday**  
17 August  
  
**15° 26°**

**Tuesday**  
18 August  
  
**18° 27°**

**Wednesday**  
19 August  
  
**18° 28°**

**Thursday**  
20 August  
  
**19° 32°**

**Friday**  
21 August  
  
**19° 32°**

 **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](#)**