

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

August 24-26

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Ankvab to Abolish Order Barring Abkhaz Kids from Attending Non-Abkhaz Schools

Occupied Abkhazia's prime minister Alexander Ankvab said that he will today abolish education minister Inal Gablia's order, which envisaged barring first-grade ethnic Abkhaz kids from attending non-Abkhaz schools.

Ankvab told Apsnypress media outlet on August 24 that the prohibition infringes on the constitutional rights.

Earlier, Abkhaz media cited the education ministry's press office as saying that minister Gablia's August 19 order aimed at raising the status and knowledge of Abkhaz language, as well as unloading (*Civil.ge, August 24, 2020*).

#### 2. Georgian 'Patriots' Visited Abkhazia for Piety, Bzhania's Aide Says

Sokhumi-based media outlets cited Lasha Sakania, Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania's aide, as confirming an alleged Abkhazia visit of members of a Kremlin-friendly Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. Sakania said however that the aim of Georgian "patriots'" visit was piety, not political negotiations.

Calling the visit "a purely humanitarian action," Sakania said his "old friends from Russian Federation" asked him to help arrange the said visit to donate the icon of the Virgin Mary to the Ilori Church of St. George, located in eastern Abkhazia's Ochamchire District, upon request by Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, the leader of the Alliance of Patriots (*Civil.ge, August 24, 2020*).

#### 3. Bzhania's Aide Resigns over Georgian Vice Speaker's Abkhazia Visit

Lasha Sakania, the aide of the Moscow-backed Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania, resigned on August 26 following the outrage over his involvement in organizing Abkhazia visit of members of the nativist Kremlin-friendly Alliance of Patriots party of Georgia.

Abkhaz media outlets reported Sakania's resignation based on an alleged post on his Facebook profile. The former aide claimed in the post that he made the decision independently to avoid a public uproar. Sakania confirmed on August 24 that he helped Georgian politicians visit Abkhazia for piety following reports by Georgian media on a "secret meeting" and subsequent outcry among Abkhaz opposition groups (*Civil.ge, August 26, 2020*).

#### 4. Ilori Affair: 'Abkhaz Church' Returns Donated Icon Back to Tbilisi

"The Abkhaz orthodox Church," one of the two groups exercising factual ecclesial control in Abkhazia, said it refuses to accept the Virgin Mary icon donated by MP Irma Inashvili, leader of Kremlin-friendly Alliance of Patriots to the Ilori Church (*Civil.ge, August 26, 2020*).

#### 5. Abkhaz, S. Ossetian Troops Attend Army Games in Russia

Troops from Kremlin-backed Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia are debuting in Russian-led International Army Games and the "Army-2020" military forum.

The International Army Games is an annual military sports event hosted by the Russian Defense Ministry since 2015, which this year is taking place between August 23 to September 5 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Russia, with a large part of competitions held in the latter. On its part, the "Army-2020" forum is held from 23 to 29 August near Moscow (*Civil.ge, August 25, 2020*).

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

### **6. S. Ossetian Leader Speaks of Abolishing 'Border' with Russia**

On the eve of the 12th anniversary of Moscow's illegitimate recognition of the independence of Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Anatoly Bibilov, Kremlin-backed leader of the region spoke of "greatest possible integration" and abolition of "border" with the Russian Federation.

In his address at the celebratory event, Bibilov reiterated his support for closer ties with Russia, noting that "the border between the two of our countries, even if, at this stage, conditions for its abolition have not yet been met, has to turn into a conditional line on the map without creating artificial hurdles for moving towards the greatest possible level of integration" (*Civil.ge, August 26, 2020*).

## ❖ **Foreign Affairs**

### **7. EU Welcomes Georgia's Alignment with Extended Crimea Sanctions**

In a statement of August 24, European Union's High Representative Josep Borrell has welcomed the alignment of Georgia with the decision of the Council of the EU regarding restrictive measures in response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. The Council's decision made on June 18, extends the existing restrictive measures until 23 June 2021.

Georgia, as well as other third countries aligning with the EU decision, including Ukraine, Albania, Montenegro, Iceland and Norway, "will ensure that their national policies conform to this Council Decision," the statement noted (*Civil.ge, August 25, 2020*).

### **8. Georgia to Host Noble Partner Exercise in September**

U.S. and Georgia-led fifth Noble Partner international military exercise will be held south-east of Tbilisi at the Vaziani Military Airfield, Vaziani drill ground and the Norio training area from September 7 to September 18.

Over 2,700 troops will take part in the drills, including Georgian, U.S., British, Polish, and French military personnel (*Civil.ge, August 26, 2020*).

## ❖ **Internal Affairs**

### **9. Opposition Agree on 'Defending Each Other's Votes' for October Elections**

On August 24, Georgian opposition parties have signed an agreement "On Protecting Each Other's Votes" for the upcoming October parliamentary elections.

A group of up to 30 signatories includes former President Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement, European Georgia, Strategy Agmashenebeli of Giorgi Vashadze, Lelo for Georgia of TBC's

Khazaradze, right-libertarian Girchi party, Republican Party, Labor Party and former Speaker Nino Burjanadze's United Georgia – Democratic Movement.

The parties argue in the text, that Bidzina Ivanishvili, chairperson and patron of the ruling Georgian Dream party, has mobilized large parts of financial and administrative resources to ensure its success in the upcoming elections, which enhances the importance of the coordinated action by opposition parties to "protect every vote" and prevent the possible fraud (*Civil.ge, August 24, 2020*).

#### **10. Russian Watchdog: Kremlin Interferes in Georgia Polls, Aids Alliance of Patriots**

Dossier Center, a Russian investigative project established by the prominent Kremlin critic, Mikhail Khodorkovsky to track criminal activities of Kremlin-associated persons, released an investigative report on August 24, claiming that the election campaign of the Alliance of Patriots, a Georgian nationalist party, is backed by Russia.

According to the report, Kremlin is placing its bets on Vice-Speaker Irma Inashvili and David Tarkhan-Mouravi, the leaders of Alliance of Patriots (AP) party, for the upcoming October parliamentary polls.

"A pre-election budget, worth millions, has already been drafted," the report reads. It does not, however, provide any documentary proof of the sums being disbursed. Only the first part of the investigation has been released (*Civil.ge, August 25, 2020*).

#### **11. TI Georgia: Obiektivi TV Illegally Airs Political Ads**

Transparency International Georgia, a local civil society organization, released a statement on August 25 accusing TV Obiektivi of illegally running political ads promoting nationalist Alliance of Patriots of Georgia party, whose leader MP Irma Inashvili is the founder of Obiektivi media agency.

According to the watchdog, the ads have been aired by the channel since as early as August 18, before the official election date has been announced, in violation of the Georgian legislation.

The TV ads show MP Inashvili making promises to implement economic projects in case of a victory in elections, "with a party flag and symbols on the background" (*Civil.ge, August 25, 2020*).

#### **12. Opposition demands Alliance of Patriots of Georgia be banned from October elections due to alleged Kremlin support**

Opposition parties in Georgia demand the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia be prohibited from running in the October parliamentary elections following the release of an investigation of the Dossier Center, which tracks the criminal activities associated with the Kremlin.

The investigation revealed that the Kremlin financially supports politicians Irma Inashvili and David Tarkhan-Mouravi, who are leading the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia in the upcoming elections (*Agenda.ge, August 25, 2020*).

#### **13. Parliament Speaker Talakvadze: gov't to charter flights for int'l observers of October parliamentary elections**

The Georgian government is ready to charter flights to bring in international observers for the upcoming parliamentary elections that will be held on October 31, says the Chairman of the Parliament, Archil Talakvadze.

Talakvadze said that the goal is to bring as many international observers in Georgia as possible and let them evaluate how the country is strengthening its democracy and holding democratic elections.

"We made changes to the legislation, according to which we defined the basic principles of safety in the conditions of the -epidemic, redistributed responsibilities. There is complete readiness to bring as many international observers as possible to the country. As soon as international monitoring missions and organisations decide to bring additional representatives to the country, the government will respond with appropriate steps", Talakvadze said (*Agenda.ge, August 25, 2020*).

#### **14. Georgian Dream Proposes to Toughen Penalties for Breaching Election Rules**

Georgian Speaker Archil Talakvadze said at a press conference on August 26 that the governing Georgian Dream party will propose further changes to the Electoral and Criminal Codes, involving toughening penalties against attempts to intimidate, threaten, or coerce voters, as well as breaching vote secrecy. The announcement comes some two months ahead of crucial October parliamentary elections.

Draft amendments will be registered in the parliament today, Speaker Talakvadze noted, adding that those failing to abide by the electoral laws will face criminal liability (*Civil.ge, August 26, 2020*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **15. 140 IDP families receive homes in Georgia's mineral resort town of Tskaltubo**

A total of 140 IDP families have received homes in a new residential building in the mineral resort town of Tskaltubo in western Georgia.

Two residential buildings in the village of Gvishtibi include recreational spaces, lighting and playgrounds. They are also adapted for people with disabilities (*Agenda.ge, August 25, 2020*).

#### **16. World Bank Enterprise Surveys: Georgia is in top 10 countries in terms of low bribery prevalence**

The World Bank has published a new Enterprise Surveys in which over 164,000 of companies from 144 countries were involved and Georgia was ranked in the top 10 countries in terms of low bribery prevalence.

In Georgia, bribery incidence, which is the percent of firms experiencing at least one bribe payment request, amounted to 1.3 per cent, while this indicator reaches 10 per cent.

In addition, bribery depth, which is defined as the per cent of public transactions in which a gift or informal payment was requested, amounted to 0.6 per cent in Georgia (*Agenda.ge, August 25, 2020*).

#### **17. Economy Minister: USAID support for tourism, manufacturing, e-commerce, and information technology to increase**

The USAID will increase support for manufacturing, e-commerce, information and communications technology (ICT), and other innovative sectors, said Georgian Economy Minister Natia Turnava earlier today after meeting USAID Georgia mission Director Peter Wiebler.

Turnava and Wiebler spoke about the expansion of the USAID Economic Security Program and future plans.

At the meeting it was noted that the USAID Economic Security Program strives for economic growth and development in value chains and sectors such as light industry, tourism, the creative industry, shared intellectual services, and solid waste management. The program also aims to attract investments in the country, creative high-paid jobs and increase sales (*Civil.ge, August 26, 2020*).

### 18. Georgia exports 23,109 tonnes of peaches and nectarines

Georgia has exported 23,109 tonnes of peaches and nectarines as of August 25 which is 85 per cent more than in the same period of last year, when 12,556 tonnes of peaches and nectarines were exported, announces the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia.

Georgian peaches and nectarines were mainly exported to:

- Russia - 14,906 tonnes
- Armenia - 7,202 tonnes
- Azerbaijan - 567 tonnes
- Kazakhstan - 112.9 tonnes
- Ukraine - 99 tonnes
- Moldova - 89.6 tonnes
- Poland - 74 tonnes
- Slovenia - 57.3 tonnes
- Singapore - 0.04 tonnes (*Agenda.ge, August 26, 2020*).

### 19. 3,170 disaster-affected Georgians to benefit from EU humanitarian aid

A total of 3,170 disaster-affected Georgian citizens will benefit from European Union humanitarian aid, which includes food parcels, hygiene kits and cash support.






"In late July 2020, heavy rains and flash floods in northwest Georgia have caused significant damage to houses and infrastructure. The European Union is providing €80,000 (about \$94,688) in humanitarian funding to assist the most affected people following the disaster", reads the official statement of the EU (*Agenda.ge, August 26, 2020*).








## Additional Information

### August 27, 2020

#### OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 3.0804 GEL	1 GBP - 4.0515 GEL	100 RUB - 4.0636 GEL
1 EUR - 3.6389 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4194 GEL	100 JPY - 2.8987 GEL

Thursday 27 August	Friday 28 August	Saturday 29 August	Sunday 30 August	Monday 31 August
				
15° 28°	17° 31°	17° 32°	18° 31°	17° 30°

-  **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](#)**