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| **NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA**  **September 9-13** | | | |
| *Compiled by:* | ***Aleksandre Davitashvili*** | *Date*: | September 14, 2020 |

* **Occupied Regions**
* **Abkhazia Region**

1. **Abkhaz Denounce Russian Annexation Remarks**

The Kremlin-backed Abkhaz foreign ministry has issued a statement decrying the remarks made in Russia regarding the annexation of Abkhazia, among others, by the Russian Federation.

The statement published on September 11 stressed that “the political status of Republic of Abkhazia is not a subject to revision,” adding that it is “defined by the constitution, declaration of independence and was judicially recognized by decree of the President of Russia from August 26, 2008.” *(mfaapsny.org, September 11, 2020)*

1. **16 New Cases, 16 More Recoveries in Abkhazia**

Moscow-backed authorities in Abkhazia have reported 16 new cases of COVID-19, taking the tally of total confirmed cases in the region to 656. In the meantime, 16 more patients have recovered, increasing the number of recoveries to 186. The number of active cases in the region to date stands at 464 *(Civil.ge, September 13, 2020)*.

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

1. **Crisis Looms in Tskhinvali as Bibilov Visits Moscow**

A few hundred protesters have reportedly gathered at a rally in downtown Tskhinvali, organized by four opposition political parties, including Nykhas, Unity of Nation, People’s Party and the Communist Party, demanding the resignation of the region’s prosecutor general Uruzmag Jagaev and fair investigation into the alleged torture-death of young inmate Inal Jabiev.

‘MP’ David Sanakoev addressed the audience, noting that the ‘lawmakers’ had not yet received a response from Anatoly Bibilov, the region’s leader, on Jagaev’s dismissal. Sanakoev said “except for eight people, no one has yet been detained in the case of Inal Jabiev, and those who gave orders must be brought to justice.”

The protest comes as Anatoly Bibilov, the Kremlin-backed leader of Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia travels to Moscow together with Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania for a working visit *(Civil.ge, September 11, 2020)*.

1. **Georgia Reports “Borderization” near Major Highway**

The Russian occupation forces resumed illegal “borderization” activities near Tskhinvali/South Ossetian occupation line adjacent to the Khurvaleti village, the State Security Service of Georgia reported on September 12.

The village of Khurvaleti of Gori municipality, surrounded by Russian-occupied territories from the west, north and east, is located a few hundred meters away from Georgia’s major east-west highway.

The SSG said that it had activated the EUMM-managed hotline and called for prompt discontinuation of activities that are “extremely damaging to security environment”. The Co-Chairs of Geneva International Discussions as well as Georgia’s international partners will be informed accordingly, SSG added *(Civil.ge, September 12, 2020)*.

* **Foreign Affairs**

1. **Wardrop Dialogue: UK to Increase Support to Georgia**

British Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas, Wendy Morton, announced after the 7th round of the Wardrop Strategic Dialogue, held virtually on September 9 between the Georgian and UK officials, that the United Kingdom has committed over GBP 2 million to help Tbilisi “bring a peaceful end to years of conflict,” along with UK Export Finance (UKEF), a government agency operating alongside the British Department for International Trade, doubling its capacity for Georgia to more than GBP 3 billion in 2020.

Wardrop Strategic Dialogue, named after Georgia-aficionado British siblings, diplomat Oliver Wardrop (first British Chief Commissioner of Transcaucasia in Georgia in 1919–20) and scholar Marjory Wardrop, brings together key elements of UK-Georgia bilateral relations from political matters, to defense and security, as well as economic and trade ties and people-to-people relations. Each year, since 2014, the two delegations talk about progress and discuss areas of future cooperation *(Civil.ge, September 10, 2020)*.

* **Parliamentary Elections – 2020**

1. **CEC Files an Administrative Complaint Against ‘Alliance of Patriots’**

Central Election Commission (CEC) filed an administrative complaint against the Kremlin-friendly Alliance of Patriots, after International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) urged CEC to examine 6 campaign clips on the party’s Facebook page on September 2.

According to the Central Election Commission, the issue regards Article 45 (3) of the Election Code of Georgia, according to which “the election program shall not contain propaganda for war or violence, appeal for change or overthrow of the existing state and social order by violence, for violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia, for national strife and enmity, or for religious or ethnic confrontation”.

According to CEC, the Court will make a final decision on the administrative penalty. According to the Election Code, violation of campaigning rules is punishable by a GEL 2000 fine *(Civil.ge, September 10, 2020)*.

1. **Georgian Dream Presents Top 20 of its Party List**

The governing Georgian Dream party presented top twenty MP candidates of its party list, who will be contesting in a proportional system in the October 31 parliamentary elections.

Below is the list of top 20 candidates in GD’s party list:

* Giorgi Gakharia, the incumbent PM
* Archil Talakvadze, incumbent Parliament Chairperson
* Irakli Kobakhidze, incumbent MP, ex-Speaker
* Tea Tsulukiani, Justice Minister
* Mamuka Mdinaradze, incumbent MP
* Kakha Kuchava, incumbent MP
* Giorgi Kakhiani, incumbent MP
* Mariam Kvrivishvili, Tourism Administration Head
* Mikheil Sarjveladze, Deputy Justice Minister
* Maia Bitadze, Vice Mayor of Tbilisi, former Deputy Environment Minister
* Mikheil Daushvili, 30, Business Ombudsman
* Giorgi Amilakhvari, Tbilisi Open University Rector
* Viktor Sanikidze, Basketball player
* Maka Bochorishvili, Deputy Ambassador to the EU
* Shalva Papuashvili, lawyer, Associate Professor at Ilia State University
* Davit Kacharava, Rugby player
* Nikoloz Samkharadze, International Relations specialist, Associate Professor at Tbilisi State University;
* Giorgi Khelashvili, IR specialist; Chair of Research Center at the Parliament; Former Deputy Ambassador to the U.S.
* Mariam Lashkhi, 32, deputy head of Georgia’s Innovation and Technology Agency
* Beka Davituliani, Tbilisi Sakrebulo member.

1. **Georgian Dream, Opposition Name Candidates for Snap Mayoral Elections**

**Kutaisi, in the western Imereti region**

Georgian Dream – Ioseb Khakhaleishvili, first deputy governor of Imereti

United National Movement – Grigol Shushania, member of Kutaisi Sakrebulo

European Georgia – Amiran Dzotsenidze, member of Kutaisi Sakrebulo

Free Georgia – Gaga Gogrichiani.

**Terjola, in Imereti region**

Georgian Dream – Lasha Gogiashvili, acting mayor of Terjola

European Georgia – Rolandi Meskhi

**Kharagauli, in Imereti region**

Georgian Dream – MP Koba Lursmanashvili

National Movement – Tornike Avalishvili, member of Kharagauli Sakrebulo

**Oni, in western Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti region**

Georgian Dream – Davit Chikvaidze, acting mayor of Oni

National Movement – Nodar Burdiladze, member of Oni Sakrebulo

**Kaspi, in east-central Shida Kartli region**

Georgian Dream – Vakhtang Maisuradze, head of the Department of Finance and Logistics at State Audit Office

National Movement – Nugzar Noniashvili, head of Kaspi regional office

European Georgia – Giorgi Khelashvili *(Civil.ge, September 11, 2020)*

1. **Watchdog on Georgian Dream Majoritarian Candidates’ Donations, Business Activities**

A new [study](https://transparency.ge/en/blog/business-connections-and-political-donations-georgian-dream-majoritarian-candidates-2020?fbclid=IwAR1JPEkfCcWhGw6Wpoddpom5dMMC8eyogxyJDn-acfL3ar7tZOwIe2gL-aY), presented by Transparency International Georgia, that looked into Georgian Dream majoritarian candidates’ political donations, business activities and asset declarations, found that 19 out of 30 GD majoritarian contenders are involved in various entrepreneurial activities, overall being connected to 186 different companies.

The report, published by local watchdog on September 11, revealed that during 2012-20, 14 out of the 30 candidates have personally made donations to the ruling party, a sum of which amounts to GEL 740,826 (USD 239,000). TI Georgia noted, however, that a larger amount of donations to the Georgian Dream come from the said candidates’ business partners and family members, which totaled GEL 3,702,806 (USD 1,195,000) since the GD came to power in 2012.

The watchdog named the largest donors among the majoritarian MP candidates, including their family members and business partners:

* Gocha Enukidze – GEL 1,254,000 (USD 405,000) – Running in Ambrolauri, Oni Tsageri, Lentekhi and Mestia district.
* Zaal Dugladze – GEL 990,000 (USD 319,000) – Running in Khashuri and Kareli district.
* Irakli Khakhubia – GEL 458,000 (USD 148,000) – Running in Poti, Khobi and Senaki district.
* Davit Songhulashvili – GEL 340,000 (USD 110,000) – Running in Gurjaani, Sagarejo Dedoplistskaro and Sighnaghi single-seat district.
* Bezhan Tsakadze – GEL 320,000 (USD 103,000) – Running in the Tkibuli, Zestaponi and Baghdati district *(Transparency.ge, September 11, 2020)*.

1. **MP Gedevan Popkhadze Tests Positive for COVID-19**

Independent MP Gedevan Popkhadze has tested positive for COVID-19, according to a statement made by Solidarity Alliance of Georgia.

Gedevan Popkhadze is a former member of the Georgian Dream and one of the founding members of the Solidarity Alliance of Georgia party. Another member, Levan Gogichaishvili, was also recently diagnosed with COVID-19 *(Civil.ge, September 13, 2020)*.

1. **NDI Releases Public Opinion Survey Results**

According to the public opinion survey released by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) released today, although economic issues remain the major concern for Georgians, a dramatically increasing number of citizens think the country is going in the right direction. Asked about in which direction Georgia is going, 39% said in a right direction (up from 19% in November 2019), the wrong direction – 32% (down from 53% in November), while 20% say Georgia is not changing at all (down from 24% in November) *(Civil.ge, September 14, 2020)*.

* **Internal Affairs**

1. **Prime Minister Speaks of “Second Wave”**

Speaking about the recent spike in infection cases at the government meeting today, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia noted that the second wave of the COVID-19 in Georgia is, as expected, starting in Autumn. Prime Minister assured there was “no reason to panic” as the situation is under control, recalling the rapid steps taken by the government “from the first day of the spread of the virus.” *(Civil.ge, September 10, 2020)*.

1. **Checkpoints Installed in Two Villages of Tsageri Municipality**

Police installed checkpoints for thermal screening and testing in the villages of Orbeli and Lajana in Tsageri Municipality, in the western Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti region, as part of the government’s steps to prevent the spread of the virus. According to the statement released by the Ministry of Interior, each person entering or exiting respective villages will undergo testing and temperature checks. No lockdown or strict quarantine measures are imposed in the villages, police say *(Civil.ge, September 10, 2020)*.

1. **Health Ministry Spent Over GEL 37 million on COVID-19 Preventive Measures in 6 Months**

ccording to the state budget 6-month performance data published by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health spent more than GEL 37 million (USD 11.9 million) on COVID-19 preventive measures in the past six months *(Civil.ge, September 10, 2020)*.

1. **87 New Cases, Highest Daily Record, 20 More Recoveries Reported**

NCDC Georgia has reported 87 new cases of COVID-19, the highest daily spike since the start of the pandemic in late February. This brings the tally of total confirmed cases to 1917. In the meantime, 20 more patients have recovered, taking the number of recoveries to 1354. The number of active cases to date stands at 518 *(stopcov.ge, September 11, 2020)*.

1. **Classroom School, University Learning Postponed in Largest Cities**

The Interagency Coordination Council, tasked with managing the coronavirus pandemic, announced that physical attendance in schools and higher education institutions will be postponed in Tbilisi, Gori, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Zugdidi and Poti until October 1 *(Civil.ge, September 11, 2020)*.

1. **158 New Cases, 9 More Recoveries**

Georgia has reported 158 new cases of COVID-19, the highest daily jump for the country since the start of the pandemic, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases to 2075. In the meantime, 9 more patients have recovered, taking the number of recoveries to 1368. The number of active cases stands at 667 (*stopcov.ge, September 12, 2020)*.

1. **152 New Cases, 6 More Recoveries**

Georgia has reported 152 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases to 2,227. In the meantime, six more patients have recovered, taking the number of recoveries to 1,369. The number of active cases to date stands at 813 (*stopcov.ge, September 13, 2020)*.

1. **165 New Cases**

Georgia has reported 165 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases to 2,392. One more patient has recovered as of today, bringing the number of recoveries to 1,370. The number of active cases to date stands at 977 *(stopcov.ge, September 14, 2020)*.

1. **Medical Director of Tbilisi Hospital of Infectious Diseases on Origins of New Cases**

As explained by Marina Ezugbaia, Medical Director of Tbilisi Hospital of Infectious Diseases, out of 165 infections diagnosed over last 24 hours, 109 were confirmed in Batumi; 17 in Tbilisi; 9 in Zugdidi; 9 in Gardabani; 6 in Gori; 6 in Gurjaani; 4 in Ozurgeti; 4 in Kutaisi; 1 in Mtskheta.

Marina Ezugbaia noted that infections in Gori and Akhmeta Municipality were related to a wedding held on September 5, that some 100 people attended. Ezugbaia urged people to refrain from attending large-scale social events *(Civil.ge, September 14, 2020)*.

1. **Checkpoints Installed in Akhmeta Municipality**

Police installed checkpoints for thermal screening and testing in the village of Matani in Akhmeta Municipality, in the Kakheti region. According to the statement released by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, any person entering or exiting the village will undergo testing and a temperature check. Interior Ministry notes that lockdown or other strict quarantine measures are not being imposed in Matani or other villages of Akhmeta Municipality *(Civil.ge, September 14, 2020)*.

* **Economy and Social Affairs**

1. **U.S. State Dept Investment Climate Statement on Georgia**

On September 10, U.S. State Department released 2020 Investment Climate Statement on Georgia. Overall, the State Department assesses Georgia as “a small but open market,” that has “made sweeping economic reforms since 1991 that have produced a relatively well-functioning and stable market economy.” It noted regarding investor-state dispute settlements, however, that despite improvements, “there remains indications of interference in judicial independence and impartiality.”

The report discusses comprehensively the legal framework for doing business in Georgia, regulations, property rights, financial sector, including capital markets and the banking system, Georgia’s various free trade agreements and bilateral investment treaties, government’s successful efforts in privatizing the vast majority of large state-owned enterprises and in fighting petty corruption *(Civil.ge, September 10, 2020)*.

1. **Georgian National Bank Sells USD 40 Mln**

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) sold USD 40 million in the Foreign Exchange Auction on September 10. According to the NBG, the average weighted bid rate was 3.0975 *(nbg.gov.ge, September 11, 2020)*.

1. **EBRD, EIB Say Nenskra HPP Non-compliant to International Standards**

The Nenskra Hydropower Plant (HPP) Project in the mountainous Svaneti region has been found to be non-compliant with the 2014 Environmental and Social Policy of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) following a two-year review.

In May 2018, community members of Chuberi village, Georgia and CSOs, CEE Bankwatch Network and Georgian Green Alternative, co-submitted a complaint against the construction of the Nenskra HPP through the EBRD Project Complaint Mechanism and the European Investment Bank (EIB) Complaint mechanism.

The EBRD Complaint Review reads that given the overlapping issues mentioned in the complaints submitted to the EBRD and the EIB, “in the interest of efficiency”, the two banks jointly conducted a field visit to Georgia and collaborated in assessing the validity of the complaints that were issued.

The complaints alleged that Nenskra HPP project had violated the following Environmental and Social Policy performance requirements:

**(I) Indigenous Peoples:** According to the complaint the bank management did not appropriately “categorize Svans (the impacted group) as Indigenous Peoples,” and thus, failed to “provide the Svans with the right to determine their development.”

**(II) Cumulative Impacts:** The complaint states that the environmental and social impact assessment for the Nenskra Project lacked an assessment of cumulative impacts.

**(III) Land Acquisition**, Involuntary Resettlement and Economic Displacement: According to the complaint, the client failed to provide a plan that “effectively mitigates economic displacement caused by the Project through the loss of resources, assets, income and livelihoods.”

**(IV) Cultural Heritage:** The document states that the environmental and social impact assessment of the Project “does not address potential Project impacts to the Svan culture and language.”

**(V) Information Disclosure and Stakeholder Engagement:** The complaint alleges that engagement and consultation with the local population affected by the project “was not proportional to the nature and scale of the Project or its potential impacts on communities.” *(Civil.ge, September 12, 2020)*

* + **Additional Information**

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| **September 14, 2020**  **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**  1 USD – 3.1140 GEL 1 GBP - 3.9931 GEL 100 RUB -4.1599 GEL  1 EUR - 3.6929 GEL 1 TRY - 0.4168 GEL 100 JPY - 2.9322 GEL     * **Movie Events - English Sessions -** [**Tickets**](https://www.kinoafisha.ge/engsessions) * **Friends of Museum (Membership to access Georgian National Museums For free of charge after one payment) -** [**Membership**](https://biletebi.ge/friends-of-museum) * **Marjanishvili Theatre –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://biletebi.ge/marjanishvili-theatre/Repertoire) * **Rustaveli Theatre -** [**Events and Tickets**](https://biletebi.ge/rustaveli-theatre/Repertoire) * **Opera and Ballet –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://tkt.ge/en/opera) * **Concerts –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://tkt.ge/en/concerts) * **Sports –** [**Events and Tickets**](https://tkt.ge/en/sport) |