|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA**  **October 6-8** | | | |
| *Compiled by:* | ***Aleksandre Davitashvili*** | *Date*: | October 9, 2020 |

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

1. **Russian MFA on Disrupted 51st Round of Geneva International Discussions**

On October 7, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova rebuffed the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, according to which, Moscow disrupted the 51st round of Geneva International Discussions.

In her press remarks, Zakharova dubbed Georgia’s accusation as “unfounded and politicized” and slammed Tbilisi of “playing anti-Russian card” amid pre-election period.

The Spokesperson noted that the decision to refrain from 51st round of discussions has been made by the Russian, Abkhaz and Tskhinvali/South Ossetian delegations due to COVID-19 related restrictions and logistical problems. “As an alternative, we proposed to conduct the talks on the same date via videoconference, but this has been declined by the Co-Chairs,” said Zakharova *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*.

1. **Former Abkhaz Leadership Forms New Opposition Movement**

On October 7, Adgur Ardzinba, former economy minister of Kremlin-backed Abkhazia and runner-up of the 2020 Abkhaz leadership race, presented a new opposition organization Abkhaz People’s Movement, Apsnypress news agency reported. Former deputy education minister Dmitry Gvaramia also joined the newly established force.

The Abkhaz People’s Movement reportedly declared protecting “Abkhaz national interests, facing various challenges and threats from time to time” as its primary goal *(Civil.ge, October 8, 2020)*.

* **Foreign Affairs**

1. **Georgia Targeted in Disinformation, Armenian Official Says**

Eduard Aghajanyan, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister of Armenia, released a statement on October 7, calling on his compatriots not to give in to disinformation presenting Georgia and Georgians as supporters of Azerbaijan in the ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Aghajanyan spoke of the recent “concerning tendencies” in social media, where “certain fake accounts, which are being operated from known and unknown centers, try to influence public perception, presenting Georgia and Georgians as supporters of the Azerbaijani side in the conflict.” *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*

* **Parliamentary Elections – 2020**

1. **Former SSG Deputy Head Quits Georgian Dream**

Ioseb Gogashvili, former Deputy Head of State Security Service of Georgia (SSG), leaves the ruling Georgian Dream party, where he has been reportedly holding a position as a Head of Monitoring, Coordination and Analytics Department.

During his service in the SSG in 2015-2018, Gogashvili has been associated with many high-profile cases, including the November 2017 anti-terrorist operation in Tbilisi and the subsequent detention operation in Pankisi gorge of Akhmeta Municipality. Corruption allegations have also been voiced against him *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*.

1. **Police Detain Four over Assault on GD Member**

Police detained four persons for assaulting Temur Shubitidze, a ruling Georgian Dream party (GD) member, who also serves as an advisor to the Chairperson of Marneuli City Assembly (Sakrebulo). Three of the four detainees are former convicts *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*.

1. **Strategy Aghmashenebeli Party Fined GEL 15,000**

Opposition Strategy Aghmashenebeli Party received a fine of GEL 15,000 from the Municipal Inspection for arbitrary placement of three election banners (each warranting a fine of GEL 5,000) on the territory of the Tbilisi Municipality without permission *(Civil.ge, October 8, 2020)*.

* **Internal Affairs**

1. **Rally in Support of Armenia held in Akhalkalaki**

Ethnic Armenians held large scale protest rally in Akhalkalaki in order to express their support towards Armenian people in the ongoing conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Gathered citizens of Georgia expressed full support towards the position of Georgian Government to maintain neutrality and offer neighbour countries to mediate the conflict. Although, they criticized Georgian Dream for closing boarders; they have demanded to get the opportunity to visit Armenia *(TV Pirveli, October 6, 2020)*.

1. **Public Defender, Religious, Ethnic Minorities Call for Inter-Ethnic Peace, Tolerance**

The Public Defender of Georgia and Councils of National Minorities and Religions under the Ombudsperson, including various Christian, Muslim and Jewish denominations, as well as ethnic Armenians and Azeris of Georgia issued a statement on October 7, urging citizens, government and media to act in the interest of peace and tolerance in the country amid renewed hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The statement called on the state bodies to actively cooperate with ethnic and religious minority communities and their leaders, to reinforce the environment of tolerance in the country. It then urged the citizens of Georgia to refrain from the possible use of ethno-national hate speech *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*.

1. **Georgia Detains Two State Experts over Ceding Lands to Azerbaijan**

On October 7, the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia (POG) stated that it detained two Border Demarcation Commission members Iveri Melashvili and Natalia Ilychova, regarding the recently initiated criminal investigation into ceding lands to Azerbaijan.

Iveri Melashvili, Head of the Service of Georgian State Border Delimitation, Demarcation and Border Relations of the Department of Neighboring Countries at the Foreign Ministry, as well as Natalia Ilychova, Chief Inspector of the Land Border Defense Department of the Border Police, an agency operating under the Interior Ministry, were both members of the Commission during both the previous United National Movement and the current Georgian Dream-led governments.

According to the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia, Melashvili and Ilychova hid the 1938 map, that was supposed to be used in the delimitation talks. Instead, the Prosecutor’s Office argued, the experts deliberately used maps from the 1970-80s when agreeing on the state border *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*.

1. **Speaker: Georgia to Seek Revision of Border Delimitation Deal with Azerbaijan**

Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze stated on October 7 that Georgia will seek to revise the border delimitation deal with Azerbaijan sealed through 2007, which “turned out to have been made against our country’s interests.”

Speaker Talakvadze’s remarks came following the Prosecutor Office’s announcement of the detainment of two Border Demarcation Commission members on the investigation into ceding lands to Azerbaijan.

Noting that the investigation findings will be used to continue the border delimitation talks, Parliament Speaker asserted that the new developments will not adversely affect the relationship with Azerbaijan, which “will remain our strategic ally and partner.” *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*

1. **Opposition, Activists Rally in Support of Detained State Experts**

A group of opposition and civic activists held a rally outside the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia (POG) on October 7, protesting the detention of two Border Demarcation Commission members, Iveri Melashvili of the Foreign Ministry and Natalia Ilychova of the Interior Ministry, regarding the recently initiated criminal investigation into the alleged ceding of lands to Azerbaijan.

MP Elene Khoshtaria of the opposition European Georgia party, who announced about the planned rally through her Facebook post, said that the rally was aimed at “expressing solidarity with the people who are victims of injustice.”

“I want the public to know that there had been no agreement, no treaty, no cession of the lands; it is Russian propaganda that was followed by Georgian Dream’s actions,” she stated *(Civil.ge, October 8, 2020)*.

1. **Foreign Minister Scolds Ambassador to Denmark for Defending Detained Colleague**

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani made fiery remarks on October 8 against Ambassador to Denmark Gigi Gigiadze who expressed his full supports towards MFA employee Iveri Melashvili detained for alleged ceding of lands to Azerbaijan.

Putting it down to the Ambassador’s “passionate reaction” to the fate of the colleague, FM Zalkaliani said Gigiadze should have notified the ministry in advance before voicing his opinion about an “extremely sensitive topic.”

Ambassador Gigiadze, who served as Deputy Foreign Minister in 2014-16, slammed the investigation into transferring territories to Azerbaijan and decried charges brought against Melashvili as “absurd” and “lacking common sense.” *(Civil.ge, October 8, 2020)*

1. **CSOs Say Azerbaijan Land Ceding Case ‘Politically Motivated’**

In their joint statement of October 8, 14 civil society organizations, including TI Georgia, ISFED, Young Lawyers Association, UN Association of Georgia, and Open Society Georgia Foundation asserted that the investigation into alleged ceding lands to Azerbaijan and the detention of two Border Demarcation Commission members – MFA’s Iveri Melashvili and Interior Ministry’s Natalia Ilychova – are “politically motivated.”

The leading CSOs, in particular, questioned the timing of the investigation some three weeks ahead of parliamentary elections, the ruling Georgian Dream party’s remarks on the case, as well as selective approaches taken by the Prosecutor’s Office during the investigation *(Civil.ge, October 8, 2020)*.

1. **Police Investigate as Two Drones Crash in Eastern Georgia**

Police had been notified about the falling of two drones in different locations in Georgia’s eastern Kakheti region on the evening of October 7, the Ministry of Interior reported.

The first drone reportedly fell in the village of Udabno, Sagarejo municipality, some 6 kilometers away from the Georgia-Azerbaijan border in the vicinity of David Gareji Monastery Complex.

Pieces of another drone landed in the village of Sanavardo, Kvareli municipality, some 55 kilometers north-east from Udabno.

Law enforcement officers, as well as forensic experts, are inspecting both areas as police open investigations. Nobody had been injured in the incidents, the Ministry of Interior noted *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*.

* **Economy and Social Affairs**

1. **World Bank Estimates Georgia’s Economy to Contract by 6% in 2020**

According to a recent World Bank economic update on Europe and Central Asia, Georgia’s economy is projected to contract by 6% in 2020 primarily due to COVID-19-related restrictions on mobility, disruption of tourism and collapse in external demand.

The shock stemming from the contraction will be accompanied by significant welfare impacts, the World Bank noted. Noting that “a dollarized economy adds to the challenges of managing the shock,” it estimated a 2.8% increase in poverty (using the USD 3.20 PPP 2011 international poverty line), which translates into as many as 160,000 Georgians ending up impoverished. 400,000 Georgians could potentially experience downward mobility, the Bank warned *(Civil.ge, October 7, 2020)*.

* + **Additional Information**

|  |
| --- |
| **October 9, 2020**  **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**  1 USD – 3.2172 GEL 1 GBP - 4.1647 GEL 100 RUB -4.1535 GEL  1 EUR - 3.7966 GEL 1 TRY - 0.4057 GEL 100 JPY – 3.0406 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) |