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| **NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA**  **October 12-14** | | | |
| *Compiled by:* | ***Aleksandre Davitashvili*** | *Date*: | October 15, 2020 |

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

1. **CSOs Appeal Gov’t, Int’l Organizations to Help Detained Gali Resident’s Transfer to Tbilisi**

Seven Georgian Civil Society Organizations, including Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association, Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC), Democracy Research Institute and Tolerance and Diversity Institute issued a joint statement on October 12, calling on the Government of Georgia, international organizations and diplomatic missions to protect and facilitate the transfer of Irakli Bebua – an ethnic Georgian Gali resident detained in Abkhazia after setting fire on a decorative banner in Abkhaz flag colors on September 30 to the Tbilisi-controlled territory.

In the statement, the CSOs called on the Council of Europe Commissionaire for Human Rights, the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, EU Special representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, among others, to use all of the tools at their disposal to protect Bebua’s rights, security and life.

Noting that “inhuman and cruel treatment during detention are characteristic of the occupied regimes,” the CSOs said Bebua’s detention is “particularly alarming” given the political context and sensitivity of his case with the incident causing social media frenzy and calls for his severe punishment among the Abkhaz *(Civil.ge, October 12, 2020)*.

1. **Constitutional Reform Commission Formed in Abkhazia**

On October 9, Moscow-backed Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania signed a decree on the formation of constitutional reform commission, aimed to develop amendments to the Abkhaz “constitution,” involving reform of the state power and governance system.

Bzhania appointed a civil society activist and co-author of current constitution Natella Akaba to head 16-member commission.

Aslan Bzhania introduced the idea of constitutional changes soon after coming into power in April. Bzhania stated in early June that amendments to the “constitution” should be undertaken under revision of specialists so the changes “could help in dealing with a number of problems.” *(Civil.ge, October 12, 2020)*

1. **EU Special Representative Visits Tbilisi, Sokhumi**

Toivo Klaar, the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, who co-chairs the Geneva International Discussions, is paying a visit to Tbilisi and Sokhumi on October 12-14, where he met with Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Lasha Darsalia and Abkhaz ‘foreign minister’ Daur Kove, as well as Russian-backed Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania.

Klaar’s visit came as the 51st round of Geneva Talks, scheduled for October 6-7, was disrupted due to Russia’s refusal to participate, as the Georgian Foreign Ministry claimed *(Civil.ge, October 14, 2020)*.

1. **Lavrov on Russian Citizens’ Property Rights in Abkhazia**

In his lengthy interview with Russian radio stations of Sputnik, Komsomolskaya Pravda and Govorit Moskva on October 14, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that the issue of property rights of Russians and ethnic Georgians with Russian citizenship in Abkhazia is under his government’s “constant attention.”

“We are a little surprised that this problem remains unresolved,” Lavrov remarked, adding that “now that the turbulence in Abkhazia seems to have subsided, we will definitely return to this topic.” *(civil.ge, October 14, 2020)*

1. **49 new cases of coronavirus in Abkhazia**

According to the local sources 134 new tests have been held on October 14, 49 out of them tested positive on COVID-19. There are 147 ongoing cases of the virus in Abkhazia. In total 23 people have died due to the virus *(Apsnypress.info, October 14, 2020)*.

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

1. **24 new cases of coronavirus in South Ossetia**

According to the local sources, in the period of February-October 15 overall 197 cases have been registered in South Ossetia *(Cominf.org, October 15, 2020)*.

* **Foreign Affairs**

1. **President Zurabishvili Talks EU, NATO Integration, Occupied Territories**

In an interview with French journal Revue Défense, Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili discussed Georgia’s Russian occupied territories and European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, asserting that **“for Georgia, there is no alternative to the European Union.”**

“Georgia has always been a European state and European integration is a return to our large European family, from which the Soviet occupation separated us,” President Zurabishvili highlighted in the October 6 interview.

Georgian President acknowledged “that now may not be the appropriate time for Brussels to make a decision on new candidates,” yet pledged to “knock on every door and leave no stones unturned” to achieve sectoral integration into the EU in the meantime.

**Regarding NATO**, the President said that “each poll shows that at least 70% of Georgians, from all political backgrounds, support our integration into NATO.”

**Speaking of the situation in occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia,** President Zurabishvili said that “it is hard to call this conflict frozen when we see the situation on the ground.” She noted that as a result of the “uneven and tragic” August 2008 war, Georgians still face human rights violations, “borderization” and wide-scale occupation.

“However, Russia could not achieve its main objective, it could not divert Georgia from its path towards the West. Georgia has proved its resilience, which has molded its identity throughout centuries, which we are proud of,” the President underscored *(Civil.ge, October 13, 2020)*.

1. **Georgia Denies Arms Transit Reports amid Karabakh Clashes**

On October 13, Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia Lasha Darsalia denounced reports of military cargo shipments to the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict passing through Georgia via civil flights as “information manipulation.”

Deputy Foreign Minister reaffirmed earlier remarks by the Georgian officials, underscoring that Tbilisi suspended military cargo transit by land and air towards Azerbaijan and Armenia as soon as tensions erupted in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

“The flights taking place in the airspace of Georgia are of humanitarian and civil nature only and fully comply with the standards of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),” Deputy FM highlighted *(civil.ge, October 13, 2020)*.

* **Parliamentary Elections – 2020**

1. **Audit Office on Campaign Donations, Ads**

According to the State Audit Office, an independent body in charge of the political finance monitoring, in the period from September 1 to September 21, political parties and independent majoritarian candidates secured donations totaling GEL 9,773,788 (USD 3,000,000).

The Audit Office reported that during the period, out of the 61 parties that were audited, 32 did not receive any donations, neither did 4 out of 9 independent majoritarian candidates.

The ruling Georgian Dream party received the largest amount of donations, some GEL 5,336,450 (USD 1,600,000), which amounted to roughly 55% of total donations.

Regarding the opposition parties, according to the State Audit Office, Lelo for Georgia, founded by banker-turned-politician Mamuka Khazaradze raised some GEL 1,019,154 (USD 317,000), 11% of the total sum of donations. Strategy Aghmashenebeli closely followed Lelo, with GEL 959,879 (USD 300,000) raised, amounting to 10%.

According to the State Audit Office, out of the Parliamentary opposition parties, European Georgia raised the largest amount, GEL 694,261 (USD 216,000) which came in at 7% of the total amount raised. Kremlin-friendly Alliance of Patriots party raised GEL 486,500 (USD 151,000), while former ruling party of the United National Movement received 450,419 (USD 140,000), 5% and 4.6% of total donations, respectively *(Civil.ge, October 12, 2020)*.

1. **GYLA Releases Second Interim Report on October Elections**

Violent incidents and political pressure were the key highlights in the report, such as alleged pressure by the ruling Georgian Dream party on Lelo for Georgia activists; an attack on a Lelo activist; a confrontation in Zugdidi during a Lelo presentation; an alleged attack on Strategy Aghmashenebeli activists in Tbilisi; alleged political pressure by GD members of Zugdidi Municipal Assembly (Sakrebulo) on a Lelo member; an alleged attack on Labor party activists; an alleged raid on United National Movement office in Tbilisi’s Samgori district; alleged attacks on two UNM activists; brawls in southern Bolnisi and Marneuli municipalities between UNM and GD activists and an alleged stone-throwing incident in Gldani district against UNM majoritarian candidate Nika Melia.

The watchdog identified one case of alleged vote-buying in favor of the UNM-led bloc member Progress and Freedom party. According to the report, party founder Kakha Okriashvili’s pharma company PSP aired an advertisement claiming to be importing medications from Turkey without any markup *(Civil.ge, October 12, 2020)*.

1. **Lelo names Khazaradze as PM candidate and presents proportional list**

Speaker Davit Usupashvili, named Mamuka Khazaradze as the party’s Prime Ministerial hopeful for the October 31 parliamentary elections.

Mamuka Khazaradze on his part, presented the section directors of the proposed “New Marshall Plan,” Lelo’s economic development plan for “the reconstruction of Georgia.” *(Civil.ge, October 13, 2020)*.

1. **United Georgia – Democratic Movement Party’s List of MP Candidates**

The United Georgia – Democratic Movement party, led by Nino Burjanadze, presented its [party list](https://civil.ge/archives/375088) to the Central Election Commission (CEC) for the October 31 parliamentary elections.

1. **Strategy Aghmashenebeli Bloc’s List of MP Candidates**

The Giorgi Vashadze – Strategy Aghmashenebeli election bloc, which also includes the Law and Justice party, presented its [party list](https://civil.ge/archives/375086) to the Central Election Commission (CEC) for the October 31 parliamentary elections.

1. **For Justice Party’s List of MP Candidates**

The For Justice party, led by Eka Beselia, presented its [party list](https://civil.ge/archives/375143) to the Central Election Commission (CEC) for the October 31 parliamentary elections.

1. **Citizens Party’s List of MP Candidates**

The Citizens party, led by Aleko Elisashvili, presented its [party list](https://civil.ge/archives/375145) to the Central Election Commission (CEC) for the October 31 parliamentary elections.

1. **Bricks Thrown at European Georgia Party’s Kutaisi Office**

Opposition European Georgia MP Otar (Oto) Kakhidze released video footage of bricks being thrown at the party’s office in Kutaisi at half past midnight. Kakhidze has called upon the police to promptly identify the perpetrator of the act *(Civil.ge, October 13, 2020)*.

1. **Police Detain One over Attack on Lelo Member**

On October 13, Lelo for Georgia’s Kutaisi majoritarian candidate Ana Natsvlishvili stated that Paata Kikabidze, a campaign office member, was attacked in Kutaisi.

Today, Interior Ministry stated that police detained one person for attacking “a member of one of the political parties” in Kutaisi *(Civil.ge, October 14, 2020)*.

* **Internal Affairs**

1. **919 New Cases, 208 Recoveries, 4 Fatalities**

Georgia has reported a record 919 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the tally of total confirmed cases to 14,440. In the meantime, 208 more patients have recovered, increasing the number of recoveries to 7,367. 4 more COVID-related fatalities were recorded, taking the overall number of Georgia’s (excluding occupied territories) COVID-related deaths to 113. The number of active cases to date stands at 6,934 *(Stopcov.ge, October 15, 2020)*.

* **Economy and Social Affairs**

1. **Georgia’s Foreign Trade in January-September 2020 (Express Data)**

Georgia’s foreign trade turnover in the first 9 months of 2020 decreased by 14.9% compared to the same period last year, amounting to USD 8.12 billion, according to express data released by the National Statistics Office, Geostat, on October 13.

Exports from Georgia decreased by 12.1% year-on-year to USD 2.4 billion, and imports were down by 15.9% y/y to USD 5.71 billion in January-September, with the trade deficit standing at USD 3.31 billion *(Civil.ge, October 13, 2020)*.

1. **Finance Ministry Sells GEL 50 Mln Bonds**

On October 13, the Ministry of Finance of Georgia sold 12-month treasury bills worth GEL 50 million (USD 15.6 million) on the Treasury Securities Auction.

Finance Ministry stated that 3 commercial banks participated in the auction, with total demand amounting to GEL 78 million (USD 24 million).

On the auction, the minimum interest rate stood at 8.061%, the maximum rate at 8.150%, while the weighted average rate yielded 8.123% *(Civil.ge, October 13, 2020)*.

* + **Additional Information**

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| **October 15, 2020**  **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**  1 USD - 3.2209 GEL 1 GBP - 4.2042 GEL 100 RUB -4.1781 GEL  1 EUR - 3.7968 GEL 1 TRY - 0.4079 GEL 100 JPY - 3.0544 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) |