



Weekly News Digest on Georgia

June 15-21, 2021

Compiled by:
Aleksandre
Davitashvili

Compiled on: June
22, 2021

Content

Internal Affairs

❖ Political Developments

1. TI Georgia: parliament essentially abandoned its function during Covid-19 crisis
 2. Public Defender, Church Agree on Joint Orphanage Monitoring Visit
 3. Police Dismantle Metal Fence in Gumati Village after Mediation
 4. CSOs Slam High Council of Justice Over Nominating Supreme Court Judges
 5. What does the Public Defender's 2020 report say?
 6. Prosecution Says Covert Recordings Manufactured, Predate 2012 Elections
 7. 47 Judges Appointed Amid Criticism
 8. Amb. Degnan "Extremely Disappointed" by the Nomination of Judges, Says Contrary to April 19 Deal
 9. US Ambassador Degnan: appointment of judges to Supreme Court must be stopped until adoption of reforms
 10. Venice Commission, ODIHR advise "more holistic approach", stability of changes in Georgian election code
- ##### ❖ COVID-19
11. Georgia to Receive 100,000 COVID-19 Vaccines from Estonia
 12. EU bank offers €50 mln to support procurement of Covid-19 vaccines, medical equipment
 13. Georgia Lifts Nationwide

Internal Affairs

❖ Political Developments

1. TI Georgia: parliament essentially abandoned its function during Covid-19 crisis

The Georgian Parliament has essentially abandoned its main function during the Covid-19 crisis, reads the report on the implementation of parliamentary monitoring prepared by Transparency International Georgia.

The study provides an assessment of parliamentary monitoring carried out during the period between January 1, 2019 and October 1, 2020.

"The new rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia were a step forward towards the enhancement of parliamentary control, which manifested in improved statistics on the use of specific parliamentary oversight mechanisms. Nevertheless, parliamentary control is weak while challenges with the accountability of the parliament and gov't members in the process of parliamentary control as well as the lack of legislative guarantees for improving the rights of the political opposition remain serious", reads the report.

The study revealed the following key challenges:

- During the Covid-19 pandemic and pandemic-induced crisis, the parliament actually refused to perform its function and fully entrusted its power of restraining fundamental human rights to the government. The parliament did not carry out an effective monitoring on the activity of the executive branch.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, four ministerial hours were held instead of scheduled 11.
- Health Minister Ekaterine Tikatadze did not appear before a committee meeting, when summoned by the opposition.
- Parliamentary control mechanisms are often not applied to issues that are important for the country.
- Gov't members and other high officials who are accountable to the parliament didn't treat the oversight function of the parliament seriously; for example, ministers didn't provide full answers to questions of MPs in a timely manner. Out of 1,683 questions posted by MPs during the reporting period, 288 questions were left unanswered (*Civil.ge, June 15, 2021*).

2. Public Defender, Church Agree on Joint Orphanage Monitoring Visit

Following an hour-long meeting today, the Public Defender of Georgia, Nino Lomjaria, and the freshly-appointed head of the Ninotsminda orphanage, Bishop Jakob agreed to jointly conduct a monitoring visit in the church-run foster home sometime during the next week.

"Since the children also have some alienation towards the Public Defender, I want us to monitor them in such a way that there is trust between us," the Ombudsperson remarked, explaining the reasoning behind the joint monitoring visit.

"I think this visit will defuse the situation," she went on, adding that the Public

- ❖ Curfew Starting July
- ❖ **Economy and Social Affairs**
- 14. Average salaries in Georgia increases by 4.4% to 1,256.2 GEL in Q1 2021
- 15. Gov't gifts new homes to 60 veteran IDPs
- 16. USAID launches new 5-year programme to build resilient, diversified energy market in Georgia
- 17. Q1'21 GDP Down by 4.5%
- 18. France to allocate €1 mln to support reform of social protection system in Georgia
- 19. World Bank: 'We are eager to participate in the development of a new strategy of Georgia'
- ❖ **Occupied Territories**
- 20. Sokhumi Adopts Asset Declaration Law Amendments
- 21. UN General Assembly Passes Georgia IDP Resolution
- 22. Georgian gov't establishes commission on deoccupation, peaceful conflict resolution
- Foreign Affairs and Security**
- 23. EU, U.S. Pledge Support to Georgia's Reforms, Sovereignty
- 24. Georgia in EU-Russia Relations Report
- 25. US Senator Shaheen: 'we need to seriously consider NATO membership for Ukraine, Georgia'
- 26. Georgians, Ukrainians rally in Geneva amid Biden-Putin meeting
- 27. Ex-PM Gakharia meets MEPs in Brussels as opposition party chair
- 28. Former US Commander Ben Hodges: what's happening in Ukraine is

Defender's monitors will afterward also be able to conduct visits at the orphanage. The social services will also continue assessing the needs of the foster children to decide if they will leave the church-run foster home or not, she said.

"We all agree that large foster homes are not appropriate for the children," the Public Defender also claimed, noting that it is crucial the orphanage with its staff meets international standards and becomes transparent (*Civil.ge, June 17, 2021*).

3. Police Dismantle Metal Fence in Gumati Village after Mediation

Police have taken down today a metal fence in Gumati village barring access to the road leading to the Rioni Valley, the site of the Namakhvani Hydropower Plant project that locals and activists have protested for nearly eight months.

The development follows the first round of mediation by a European Energy Community Secretariat representative between the civil society and activists and the Georgian Government, which has resulted in authorities pledging to deconstruct barriers and allow access to the Valley, restricted from April 2021.

Varlam Goletiani of the Save Rioni Valley movement noted the government delivered on its commitment made during the meeting. But, the 28-year-old movement leader recalled that authorities also pledged to follow up about the activists detained during earlier protests.

"The prosecution should make a statement on [those] detained, and police that have been mobilized in the valley as of late should leave," said Goletiani (*Civil.ge, June 17, 2021*).

4. CSOs Slam High Council of Justice Over Nominating Supreme Court Judges

Seven local civil society organizations (CSOs) today decried the High Council of Justice's (HCoJ) decision to present nine Supreme Court Judge nominees to the Georgian Parliament for selection.

The CSOs underscored that the EU-brokered April 19 deal between Georgian political parties "unequivocally points to the need for ambitious judicial reform," meaning that the competition for the Supreme Court Judges must be halted.

Noting that the Venice Commission decision also "indicates the need to restart the competition for the selection of Supreme Court Justices," the local watchdogs claimed the HCoJ, the body that oversees the judiciary, is attempting to force important decisions with its existing composition.

The watchdogs highlighted that the "judicial clan" and the HCoJ would not be able to take "such bold steps" without "unconditional support" from the ruling Georgian Dream party. The latter, they claimed, "indicates a lack of political will to implement qualitative changes in the judiciary," and to fulfill the commitments of the April 19 deal by the ruling party (*Civil.ge, June 17, 2021*).

5. GD Chair Kobakhidze Says Holding Pride Week Irresponsible

In a June 17 interview aired on pro-opposition channel TV Pirveli, MP Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairperson of the ruling Georgian Dream party, said organizers of the upcoming Pride Week in Tbilisi "should have abstained" from planning the event.

"Given the whole context, this would be the responsible decision," said the senior GD lawmaker. "However, it is what it is," he added.

The ruling party chair denied attempting to please the Georgian Orthodox Church with his remarks, stating that he has "his own position" on the matter.

continuation of what started in Georgia in 2008

The Georgian Dream Chair also noted that his party, in May, discussed signing onto the agreement on LGBTQ rights, which 15 other Georgian political parties signed, though reiterated that the ruling party decided to abstain from joining the pledge in the end.

Giorgi Tabagari, Head of the Tbilisi Pride, a local organization uniting LGBTQ and rights activists, said MP Kobakhidze's remarks undermine the Georgian Constitution. "We live in a country that is in deep political crisis, a deep crisis of secularism and is devoid of values – all of which can be read in Kobakhidze's statement," he said (*Civil.ge, June 18, 2021*).

6. What does the Public Defender's 2020 report say?

The report says that last year the Public Defender's office received 5,698 notifications of alleged cases of human rights violation, while 3,859 of the 5,698 notifications were accepted.

The report says that the improper treatment in prisons and the presence of criminal influence there still remain a serious challenge.

"We have received 154 notifications on alleged improper treatment mostly by prison administration and police employees," said the report.

The report praised the adoption of laws 'on the elimination of all forms of discrimination' and the law for people with disabilities in the last year, as well as amendments in the labour code which should ensure equal working conditions for men and the women.

However, the ombudswoman stated that the pandemic restrictions have hindered the effective enforcement of the equality rights.

"Beyond the objective obstacles created by the pandemic, there have been governmental regulations which particularly affected several groups and their rights, especially the women, representatives of religious minorities, LGBT+ community and people with disabilities," said the report.

The report says that the changes in the labour code which boosted the supervisory power of the labour inspection and increased the number of inspectors were positive (*Agenda.ge, June 18, 2021*).

7. Prosecution Says Covert Recordings Manufactured, Predate 2012 Elections

The Prosecutor's Office (POG) said the investigation into the covert recordings, involving current Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, Bera Ivanishvili, the son of Georgian Dream founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, and Anzor Chubinidze, who serves as the Head of the Special State Protection Service (SSPS), revealed that the tapes are a fabrication, combining different telephone conversations obtained through wiretapping between October 2011 and October 2012.

According to the POG, Bera Ivanishvili, PM Garibashvili, and the SSPS Head were wiretapped by order of officials in charge of the Constitutional Security Department of the Interior Ministry "under several criminal cases," and using made-up names.

The Prosecution claimed the wiretapping began on October 4 of 2011, "a day before Bidzina Ivanishvili formed an opposition political party and made a public statement about running in the 2012 parliamentary elections." The investigation, therefore, excluded that the conversations were recorded when Garibashvili held a Ministerial post, or when Anzor Chubinidze was the Head of the Special State Protection Service (*Civil.ge, June 18, 2021*).

8. 47 Judges Appointed Amid Criticism

The High Council of Justice (HCoJ) filled 47 vacant positions at Georgia's lower instance courts on June 17, amid widespread criticism from the civil society and the opposition.

The judges were designated to city and appellate courts throughout Georgia, including those of the capital Tbilisi and western Kutaisi cities. Despite the appointments, 41 positions remain open as the HCoJ, the body that oversees the judiciary, initially opened the selection process for 88 seats.

Ahead of the HCoJ move, several Georgian civil society outfits had argued the appointments would "postpone" the perspective of strengthening the judiciary. Coming ahead of the judiciary reforms envisaged in the April 19 EU-brokered deal, filling the vacancies at Georgia's courts makes it "improbable to appoint new, qualified and professional judges," the key watchdogs stressed.

Meanwhile, opposition politicians had argued the appointments would serve to further the sway of a group of influential judges in the judiciary, often referred to as the "clan." MP Giorgi Vashadze, Strategy Aghmashenebeli leader, argued that the "clan" aims to "deepen its roots" in the judiciary while the Georgian Dream remains in power.

In response to the developments, MEP Viola von Cramon (The Greens/EFA, Germany) stressed the importance of "ambitious judicial reform," also "linked" to receiving financial assistance from the EU. "Clan system in [Georgian] judiciary erodes rule of law," she asserted (*Civil.ge, June 18, 2021*).

9. Amb. Degnan "Extremely Disappointed" by the Nomination of Judges, Says Contrary to April 19 Deal

US Ambassador Kelly Degnan took up a media question concerning the controversial appointment of judges by the high council at the event dedicated to the World Refugee Day today.

Ambassador said she was "extremely disappointed" to see the High Council of Justice push through nominations, and stressed that this was "not in the spirit of the April 19th agreement" between the ruling party and the opposition. Highlighting that the US assisted Georgia in judicial reforms for 25 years, she claimed the political deal created "a perfect opportunity" for redressing some of the shortfalls before making new appointments in the judiciary. Four members of the High Council of Justice were also appointed recently, amid criticism (*Civil.ge, June 19, 2021*).

10. US Ambassador Degnan: appointment of judges to Supreme Court must be stopped until adoption of reforms

The appointment of judges to the Supreme Court by the Georgian High Council of Justice (HCJ) must be stopped temporarily until fundamental reforms are implemented in the judiciary and a wide discussion of the issue is held, US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan said earlier today at a conference of the International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy (ISFED) on Digital Election Campaign and Information Manipulations in Georgia.

Ambassador Degnan underscored the importance of both the ruling party and the opposition's commitment to the April 19 agreement, which was signed by the majority of Georgian political parties (*Agenda.ge, June 22, 2021*).

11. Venice Commission, ODIHR advise "more holistic approach", stability of changes in Georgian election code

The Venice Commission and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (ODIHR) advise "more holistic approach" and less frequent changes to Georgian election code in their urgent opinion document released on Friday.

The joint paper includes a number of recommendations for amending the electoral bill that followed the agreement between the government and some opposition parties in April, breaking a political deadlock in the country following opposition parties' boycott of the parliament after the October 31, 2020 elections.

The Venice Commission/ODIHR opinion paper offers advice on composition of election administration, frequency of changes to the electoral legislation and more, while acknowledging that draft amendments to the code were made in "close cooperation between the ruling party and several opposition parties", a fact "particularly noteworthy" considering the boycott (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2021*).

❖ COVID-19

12. Georgia to Receive 100,000 COVID-19 Vaccines from Estonia

Georgia is set to receive 100,000 COVID-19 vaccines as a donation from Estonia, the Estonian Foreign Ministry announced today.

"Estonia will also support our Eastern neighbour Moldova by donating 100 000 doses of vaccine and will donate another 100 000 doses of vaccine to our partner Georgia," the statement said.

The Estonian Foreign Ministry specified neither the type of vaccine to be allocated nor the date of the donation. Estonia itself is administering four jabs among its populace – Oxford/AstraZeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Janssen.

As of June 17, a total of 221,156 persons have received at least a single dose of coronavirus vaccine since Georgia initiated vaccine rollout on March 15. In the meantime, 74,495 persons have been fully vaccinated (*Civil.ge, June 17, 2021*).

13. EU bank offers €50 mln to support procurement of Covid-19 vaccines, medical equipment

The European Investment Bank has allocated €50 million to the government of Georgia for the procurement of vaccines against Covid-19 through the COVAX facility, as well as other medical equipment essential for the treatment of Covid-19 patients, announces the EU Delegation to Georgia.

In 2020 alone, the EIB Group provided €210 million in loans and guarantees to support the resilience of Georgia's healthcare system, and speed up recovery of the national economy from the Covid-19 pandemic (*Civil.ge, June 17, 2021*).

14. Georgia Lifts Nationwide Curfew Starting July

Georgia will lift its seven-month-long nationwide curfew starting July 1, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili announced following the June 22 Inter-Agency Coordination Council meeting. Also, wearing face masks outdoors will no longer be mandatory starting today.

Restrictions will remain on restaurants, bars, and other food and entertainment facilities, which will be allowed to operate only until 00:00 after the curfew is canceled. Face masks also remain obligatory in indoor public places, public transport, and bus stops.

National Center for Disease Control chief Amiran Gamkrelidze said COVID-19 epidemiological situation has "slowly" begun to improve in Georgia following a

third-wave peak in May. But the senior health official appealed to the public to be cautious. "Even though [wearing a] face mask will not be mandatory in outdoor spaces, it is still recommended," Gamkrelidze stressed (*Civil.ge, June 22, 2021*).

❖ **Economy and Social Affairs**

15. Average salaries in Georgia increases by 4.4% to 1,256.2 GEL in Q1 2021

Average monthly nominal earnings in Georgia increased by 53.5 GEL (4.4%) in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the same period of the previous year and amounted to 1,256.2 GEL (about \$397.53/€327.83), reports the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The highest monthly earnings were observed in the following fields:

- Financial and insurance activities – 2,448.5 GEL (-5.7% y/y)
- Information and communication – 2,159.8 GEL (+14.4%)
- Professional, scientific and technical activities – 1,798.9 GEL (+0.2%)
- Construction – 1,664.5 GEL (-2.3%)

The average earnings for women reached 1,022.9 GEL (about \$323.70/€266.95), while men earned 1,473.4 GEL (about \$466.27/€384.51) per month (*Agenda.ge, June 16, 2021*).

16. Gov't gifts new homes to 60 veteran IDPs

The Georgian Government has gifted new homes to 60 Internally Displaced veterans and their families in Georgia's western cities of Zugdidi and Kutaisi (*Agenda.ge, June 16, 2021*).

17. USAID launches new 5-year programme to build resilient, diversified energy market in Georgia

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is launching a new five-year programme in Georgia that aims to build a resilient and diversified energy market in the country, announces USAID.

"The five-year activity will support policy reforms and private sector investments to help Georgia upgrade its energy infrastructure and build new power generation capacity. This advances USAID's strategic objectives of helping Georgia ensure a stable supply of affordable energy for households and businesses and build resilience against malign influence, including overdependence on imported energy and vulnerability to cyberattacks", said USAID.

Over the next five years, USAID will deepen its partnership with the government of Georgia and build new partnerships with private sector stakeholders in Georgia's energy sector (*Agenda.ge, June 17, 2021*).

18. Q1'21 GDP Down by 4.5%

Georgia's real GDP contracted by 4.5% year-over-year during the first quarter of 2021, according to preliminary data released by the National Statistics Office (Geostat) on June 18.

In the first quarter, GDP at current prices amounted to GEL 11.3 billion (USD 3.5 billion), while the GDP deflator increased by 6.8%.

Geostat reported that decreases in the value-added in accommodation and food services (-54%), administrative and support services (-34%), arts, entertainment and recreations (-25.4%), construction (-19.4%), real estate (-6.4%), and transportation and storage (-9%) contributed significantly to the real GDP

downturn (*Civil.ge, June 18, 2021*).

London Stock Exchange (*Agenda.ge, June 18, 2021*).

19. France to allocate €1 mln to support reform of social protection system in Georgia

France continues to support the development of a new social protection policy in Georgia through the French Development Agency (AFD) and is offering €1 million in a grant.

French Ambassador to Georgia Diego Colas announced the provision of the new grant on June 17 at a conference where the conclusions of the first technical assistance programme implemented in 2017-2020 were presented.

"Last week Georgia and AFD concluded a comprehensive three-year work programme, and reform of the social protection system is one of the pillars of that programme. In this context, I am announcing today that we have reserved a grant of €1 million for technical assistance to make the link between the work already done and the reforms to come, and this grant will be disbursed over the weeks to come", said Colas (*Agenda.ge, June 18, 2021*).

20. World Bank: 'We are eager to participate in the development of a new strategy of Georgia'

The World Bank Vice President for Europe and Central Asia Anna Bjerde, who is visiting Georgia, has announced that the World Bank is eager to participate in the development of a new strategy for Georgia after the meeting with the Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili.

The new strategy of the country is being written now and in terms of the development of reforms, which the Georgian government so desperately needs, we think our assistance will be relevant. Georgia is a successful reformer and it will soon return to the reform agenda and programme, which we are pleased to support," said Bjerde.

Bjerde stated that the World Bank will help Georgia in the development of the digital economy (*Agenda.ge, June 18, 2021*).

❖ Occupied Territories

21. Sokhumi Adopts Asset Declaration Law Amendments

Moscow-backed leader of occupied Abkhazia Aslan Bzhania on June 14 approved amendments to the assets declaration legislation which covers "officials," "lawmakers," "president," "vice-president," and related candidates as those subject to the law, replacing the previously worded "civil servants."

The initial legislation on asset declarations was adopted in February 2019, but it included a provision stipulating that the law could only enter into force after the code on "civil servants" was adopted as well.

By introducing a new definition and dropping the term "civil servants" from the list, the asset declaration law will no longer be dependent on adopting the "civil service law," clarified lawmaker Givi Kvachia.

The move came amid a push by an anti-corruption advocacy group for Abkhaz lawmakers to set an exact date for the asset declaration legislation's entry into force (*Civil.ge, June 16, 2021*).

22. UN General Assembly Passes Georgia IDP Resolution

The United Nations General Assembly adopted on June 16 a resolution reiterating the right of return of all displaced persons and refugees to Georgia's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia by a vote of 80 in favor, 14

against, and 70 abstentions. Alongside Georgia, which has initiated the resolution since 2008, it was co-sponsored by 57 other states.

Similar non-binding resolutions have been passed by the UN General Assembly for fourteen years in a row – the first one, initiated in 2008, was in respect of Abkhazia and all the following ones in respect of both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

- In 2020, 84 countries voted in favor, 13 against, and 78 abstentions.
- In 2019, 79 countries voted in favor, 15 against, with 57 abstentions.
- In 2018, 81 countries voted in favor, 16 against, with 62 abstentions.

Along with the Russian Federation, the following countries voted against the resolution this year: Belarus, Burundi, Cuba, Comoros, North Korea, Laos, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, Vietnam and Zimbabwe (*Civil.ge, June 17, 2021*).

23. Georgian gov't establishes commission on deoccupation, peaceful conflict resolution

The Georgian government has established a commission to create a Georgian State Strategy for Deoccupation and Peaceful Conflict Resolution.

The commission will be managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The commission will be set up with public involvement, and will develop an inclusive and comprehensive state strategy by the end of the year.

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani noted that the main goal of the commission will be 'to establish a common national process and jointly develop a common approach and strategic vision to deoccupation and the peaceful settlement of the conflict.'

FM Zalkaliani said that the difference between the already existing strategy and the one to come is 'an even higher degree of legitimacy' guaranteed by a much more inclusive process.

"...the country is facing new and more difficult geopolitical challenges and at the same time the humanitarian situation in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali is getting worse every day [...] it is necessary for our policy to be proactive and take even more effective and specific steps", stated FM Zalkaliani (*Agenda.ge, June 21, 2021*)

Foreign Affairs and Security

24. EU, U.S. Pledge Support to Georgia's Reforms, Sovereignty

The statement of the U.S.-EU Summit held a day after the NATO's 2021 Brussels Summit pledged on June 15 support "to the reform path" of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova.

"We are determined to continue to stand in support of the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the EU's Eastern partners," the document highlighted. The U.S. and EU also noted they resolve to work towards "long-term peace, resilience, and stability" in the South Caucasus.

The document also condemned Russia's "continued actions to undermine" Georgia's and Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence.

"To coordinate our policies and actions, we plan to establish a U.S.-EU high-level dialogue on Russia," the statement underscored (*Civil.ge, June 16, 2021*).

25. Georgia in EU-Russia Relations Report

"The EU will continue to raise Russia's consistent breaches of international law in Ukraine, Georgia and elsewhere prominently," pledges a joint communication document published on June 16 by the European Commission and Josep Borrell,

High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The document, addressed to the European Council and Parliament, underscores that Russia “undertakes direct military and hybrid actions in the unresolved conflicts that it feeds in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova.”

Meanwhile, the report notes, the EU has continued the non-recognition policy on the “Russian-supported ‘independence’ of the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia,” as well as regarding the “illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula.” (*Civil.ge, June 16, 2021*)

26. US Senator Shaheen: ‘we need to seriously consider NATO membership for Ukraine, Georgia’

In her op-ed for US Today titled ‘A wake-up call for the West: When Joe Biden meets Vladimir Putin, don’t ignore Belarus’ Shaheen speaks about Russia’s destruction actions in the region and says that ‘Russia’s first play to subvert democracy in Eastern Europe started with Georgia.’

“Both (Georgia and Ukraine) want to join (NATO), which would be devastating for Putin’s plans. Since its inception, NATO has been open to countries who make the sovereign decision to join, and approved unanimously, and it should not be any different now. Reforms are required to ensure the alliance would be gaining strong allies, but failure to act would deliver a victory for Putin,” Shaheen said (*Agenda.ge, June 16, 2021*).

27. Georgians, Ukrainians rally in Geneva amid Biden-Putin meeting

Georgians and Ukrainians are holding a rally in Geneva amid the ongoing meeting of the US and Russian President's Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin, protesting the Russian occupation of Georgian and Ukrainian territories and calling upon the world to stand against Russia’s destructive actions in the region. The protesters told journalists that ‘Georgians and Ukrainians are standing together to tell the world that the countries need international support against Russia’s continued aggression.’

Georgian demonstrators have also protested the severe humanitarian situation in Georgia’s Russian-occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, erection of artificial barriers and illegal detention of Georgian citizens (*Agenda.ge, June 16, 2021*).

28. Ex-PM Gakharia meets MEPs in Brussels as opposition party chair

Former Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia, who now chairs political party For Georgia, is holding meetings with European Parliament members in Brussels. During his meetings with MEPs Giorgi Gakharia has spoken about EU-Georgia relations, the country’s aspirations for EU membership as well as the current political situation in Georgia ahead of the upcoming local self-government elections (*Agenda.ge, June 16, 2021*).

29. Former US Commander Ben Hodges: what's happening in Ukraine is continuation of what started in Georgia in 2008

Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, a former commanding general of the United States Army Europe, has tweeted that what is happening in Ukraine now ‘is a continuation of what started in Georgia in 2008’.

Hodges has responded to Luke Coffey, the Director of the Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at The Heritage Foundation, who has expressed his concern that the US and Russian presidents - Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin - have not mentioned Georgia at the press conferences following their meeting in Geneva, Switzerland yesterday.

"Russia stops only when they are stopped. What's happening in Ukraine now is a continuation of what started in Georgia in 2008. President Biden said he'd know in 3-6 months what sort of dialog he'd have with President Putin. He's on the clock... <https://t.co/Aaxx2DMO50>" – says tweet of Hodges.

Calling on Georgia's friends in the West 'to work harder at getting Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali back onto the international agenda', Luke Coffey underscored that 20% of Georgia is occupied.

"Almost unbelievable that Georgia was not mentioned once in either the Putin or Biden press conferences", has tweeted (*Agenda.ge, June 17, 2021*).