



# Daily News Digest on Georgia

## September 3-8, 2021

Compiled by:  
Aleksandre  
Davitashvili

Compiled on:  
September 9, 2021

### Content

#### Internal Affairs

##### ❖ Political Developments

1. CSOs: Garibashvili Remarks Aid Violent Homophobic Attitudes
2. GD Mulls Refusing EU-Brokered Rule on Chief Prosecutor Selection
3. Elections 2021: Key Dates and Procedures
4. Public Defender Demands Prosecutions Against Homophobic Pogrom Organizers
5. Georgian Opposition Parties Talk Pressure from Security Service
6. Ruling party skeptical of ex-president Saakashvili's continued vows to return
7. Parliament Endorses Constitutional Amendments in First Hearing
8. Parliament Adopts Controversial June 20 Amnesty Law
9. Civil activists protest amnesty bill for June 2019 rallies amid its adoption
10. EU: Georgia Failed Third Pledge on Judicial Reform
11. U.S. Slams Parliament's Rejection of Chief Prosecutor Selection Amendment
12. Kobakhidze Says EU, U.S. Ambassadors Need Better Legal Consultants
13. Supreme Court Rules 10-Year Jail for Ex-Defense Minister
14. Man arrested for murder of Australian citizen Shanae Brooke Edwards in Tbilisi

### Internal Affairs

#### ❖ Political Developments

##### 1. CSOs: Garibashvili Remarks Aid Violent Homophobic Attitudes

A group of civil society organizations, united in a coalition No to Phobia, said today recent election campaign remarks by Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili strengthen violent homophobic attitudes and leads to increasing social polarization in Georgia.

PM Garibashvili said that the planned LGBTQ pride march of July 5, cancelled amid homophobic violence and the lack of police protection, served as the United National Movement's "gravest provocation" and "conspiracy against our people." The UNM, former governing party, is the ruling Georgian Dream's arch-rival (*Civil.ge, September 4, 2021*).

##### 2. GD Mulls Refusing EU-Brokered Rule on Chief Prosecutor Selection

Ruling Georgian Dream party chair Irakli Kobakhidze today spoke against introducing a 3/5 majority vote for electing the Prosecutor General, as the discussions on the constitutional amendments initially envisaged in the EU-brokered April 19 deal began at the Parliament.

The current draft amendments stipulate that the first two attempts at electing the Prosecutor General require a 3/5 vote, and if unsuccessful, subsequent vote requires a simple majority. The deal envisaged a greater involvement of the opposition in selecting key public officials, such as the chief prosecutor and the head of Central Election Commission.

But, MP Kobakhidze said endorsing the "absurd" provision – which GD agreed to as part of the April 19 agreement in spring – would be "insulting" to him as a lawyer (*Civil.ge, September 4, 2021*).

##### 3. Elections 2021: Key Dates and Procedures

**September 6** – Deadline for amending the party lists, changing mayoral and majoritarian candidates;

**September 7** – The CEC publishes on its website the registered party lists, as well as the information on the majoritarian candidates, which will be included on the ballots;

**September 22** – Local observer organizations apply for registration at the relevant election commission, which shall decide within five days after receiving the application;

**September 25** – International observer organizations apply for registration at the CEC, which shall decide within three days after receiving the application;

**September 27** – Deadline for the CEC to release final/corrected data on the total number of voters and their breakdown by electoral districts; Media representatives apply for accreditation to the relevant election commission;

**October 2** – Election Day. Polling stations open at 8:00 and close at 20:00;

**October 16** – District Election Commissions summarize the results of Sakrebulo and mayoral polls (except in Tbilisi); CEC summarizes the results of Tbilisi mayoral and City Council (Sakrebulo) votes, draws up a final protocol.

15. Local media names Georgian citizen Rafael Mursakulovi as the suspect in Shanae Brooke Edwards's murder
16. Rustavi 2 case: Prosecutor claims Ex-head Gvaramia's guilt in misuse of funds proved by accountant's testimony
17. Gakharia, Georgian Dream Leaders Trade Accusations
18. Garibashvili, NDI's Madelaine Albright Meet Online
19. European Georgia Talks "Politically Motivated" Court Case
20. "Drug Test War" between Kaladze and Gakharia
- ❖ **COVID-19**
21. Public transport to resume, sports competitions permissible without spectators in Georgia
22. Georgia starts 2.8 mln GEL lottery to boost Covid-19 vaccination rates
23. Georgia launches Covid-19 vaccine application with QR code reader
24. Red Cross to donate 100,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccine to Georgia
25. Children over 12 with chronic diseases will be able to receive Covid-19 vaccines in Georgia
- ❖ **Economy and Social Affairs**
26. Annual Inflation Hits 10-Year High at 12.8% in August
27. Georgia to receive \$286 million in reserve asset from IMF
- ❖ **Occupied Territories**
28. Russian Delegation Visits Sokhumi

**October 30** – Run-offs for mayoral and majoritarian races, if there are any;

**December 15** – The CEC presents a final report to the Parliament of Georgia (*Civil.ge, September 4, 2021*).

#### **4. Public Defender Demands Prosecutions Against Homophobic Pogrom Organizers**

Public Defender Nino Lomjaria said today she has requested the Prosecutor's Office to launch criminal proceedings against Zurab Makharadze, far-right Alt-Info TV outlet anchor, and Spiridon Tskipurishvili, a clergyman, over organizing group violence during the July 5 homophobic pogroms.

Two months after the violence spree, that resulted in attacks on more than 50 journalists, the authorities have not yet launched prosecution against anyone for organizing the disturbance, according to the Public Defender. Based on public footage she argued anchor Makharadze had "continuously announced" and subsequently led the violence on July 5.

The ombudsperson also cited footage showing clergyman Tskipurishvili openly calling on the participants of the homophobic counter-rally against the Tbilisi Pride march to "use violence for the homeland." Tskipurishvili was later reprimanded by the Georgian Orthodox Church (*Civil.ge, September 6, 2021*).

#### **5. Georgian Opposition Parties Talk Pressure from Security Service**

Former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's For Georgia, European Georgia and right-libertarian Girchi – More Freedom parties have accused the law enforcement/security agencies of pressuring their candidates into dropping out of election races ahead of the October 2 local polls.

Natia Mezvrishvili, For Georgia's Gldani district majoritarian hopeful, said on September 4 dozens of their candidates have already withdrawn due to fears of "dismissals," "pressuring businesses" and "disclosure of personal information." These people were then coerced into spreading "false" information via pro-government media, she added (*Civil.ge, September 6, 2021*).

#### **6. Ruling party skeptical of ex-president Saakashvili's continued vows to return**

Head of the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party Irakli Kobakhidze has stated that even Saakashvili's pledge that he will return, 'which, of course, is not serious' has boosted the GD's rating by at least seven per cent.

GD officials say Saakashvili would be arrested as soon as he entered the country as he faces several criminal charges, including the violent dispersal of anti-government mass protests on November 7, 2007, a raid on TV channel Imedi by riot police and the illegal take-over of the property (*Agenda.ge, September 7, 2021*).

#### **7. Parliament Endorses Constitutional Amendments in First Hearing**

Georgian Parliament endorsed today with 126 votes in the first hearing the constitutional amendments, agreed in the EU-brokered April 19 deal, without introducing the 3/5 vote for electing the chief prosecutor.

The amendments, if adopted in the third hearing, will decrease to 2% from 5% the election threshold in the next two parliamentary polls, to be conducted fully proportionally. They will also reduce to four from seven the number of MPs necessary for forming a parliamentary faction.

**The Georgian Dream backtracked on its support from the provision on selecting the Prosecutor General.** As per the EU-brokered deal, which the GD

- 29. Abkhaz District Head Talks Gali Passportization
  - 30. EU Calls for Reopening Tskhinvali Crossing Points
  - 31. Arbitrarily Detained American Released from Tskhinvali Custody
  - 32. Military drills underway in Russian occupied Tskhinvali
- Foreign Affairs & Security**
- 33. Georgian, Norwegian FMs Talk Kabul Evacuation, Vaccine Availability
  - 34. U.S. Congressmen, Georgian FM Discuss Defense, Security, Trade Ties
  - 35. Parliament Speaker Kuchava Visits Vienna
  - 36. Georgian, Armenian PMs pledge to create new opportunities for regional stability

quit in July, first two attempted votes for electing the chief prosecutor would have had a 3/5 threshold, while subsequent attempts required a simple majority. (*Civil.ge, September 7, 2021*).

### **8. Parliament Adopts Controversial June 20 Amnesty Law**

Georgian Parliament adopted in its third hearing the controversial amnesty law granting clemency to any wrongdoers, both protesters and law enforcement officers, during the anti-occupation unrests of June 20-21, 2019 in downtown Tbilisi.

Penned as per the EU-brokered April 19 deal, the law pardons any crime done, planned, or attempted except for grave injury, torture, threat of torture and inhumane treatment. It covers concluded, ongoing or possible future investigations. Also, those entitled to amnesty will be allowed to refuse it.

Despite having quit the agreement on July 28, the ruling Georgian Dream party lawmakers chose to follow through with the law, endorsing it with 79 votes against 15.

Intended as a mechanism to release United National Movement chair Nika Melia, detained on charges of heading mass disturbance outside the Parliament in June 2019, the GD-tabled bill failed to garner opposition support as it covered law enforcement officers as well (*Civil.ge, September 7, 2021*).

### **9. Civil activists protest amnesty bill for June 2019 rallies amid its adoption**

Civil activists are protesting the adoption of an amnesty bill by the Georgian parliament stipulated by the April 19 EU-mediated agreement for the June 2019 protests that were sparked by the presence of Russian MPs in the Georgian parliament.

Georgian parliament adopted the bill earlier today with 79 votes in favour and 15 votes against it.

Due to the stipulation about amnesty in the agreement, the largest opposition United National Movement (UNM) party back in April refused to sign the EU-mediated agreement which resolved the political crisis in the country caused by the parliamentary elections 2020.

However, UNM decided to join the agreement on September 2 regardless of the stipulation about amnesty in the document after the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party withdrew from it in late July 'due to the main opposition party's refusal to join the agreement.' (*Agenda.ge, September 7, 2021*)

### **10. EU: Georgia Failed Third Pledge on Judicial Reform**

The European Union said it "regrets that yet another commitment to reform the Judiciary was not upheld today," after the Georgian Dream backtracked on introducing a 3/5 majority vote for electing the Prosecutor General in a first parliamentary reading. The change was agreed as per the EU-brokered April 19 agreement.

The statement of the EU Delegation to Georgia highlighted that the withdrawal of the amendment is "a third setback within only two months, in terms of Georgia's commitments to reform its Judiciary."

The EU recalled that earlier OSCE/ODIHR assessed the Supreme Court appointments in July, alongside those made over the past two years, as lacking "integrity, objectivity and credibility." It added that the last week, the EU noted Georgia's failure to "sufficiently address" the condition — the court reform — to

EUR 75 million aid, which GD preemptively refused (*Civil.ge, September 7, 2021*).

#### **11. U.S. Slams Parliament's Rejection of Chief Prosecutor Selection Amendment**

The U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi said today the Georgian Parliament's failure to introduce a 3/5 majority vote for the selection of the Prosecutor General "is another missed opportunity to increase the independence, transparency, and integrity of Georgia's judiciary."

The Embassy recalled that the proposed change was recommended for Georgia by the Venice Commission, in a report requested by Parliament, adding that equally as important was the EU-brokered April 19 deal, signed by Georgian Dream among others, that committed to making the change to increase the public's confidence in the independence of the Prosecutor General from political interference.

Noting that the Georgian Dream's refusal to support the amendment contradicts its July 28 reiteration of its commitment to the judicial reforms and the Constitutional amendments laid out in the April 19 deal, the U.S. Embassy said "this is yet another broken promise by the ruling party to make the much-needed judicial reforms that Georgian Dream and opposition party leaders have pledged, of their own accord, to adopt." (*September 7, 2021*)

#### **12. Kobakhidze Says EU, U.S. Ambassadors Need Better Legal Consultants**

Ruling Georgian Dream party chair Irakli Kobakhidze has said EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell and U.S. Ambassador Kelly Degnan do need "appropriate legal consultants" and that "naturally, the ambassadors cannot analyze legal norms themselves."

MP Kobakhidze made these remarks on Rustavi 2 TV, in reaction to the EU and U.S. Embassies slamming the Georgian Dream over backtracking on its pledge to introduce a 3/5 majority vote for electing the Prosecutor General in a first parliamentary reading earlier today.

The EU and U.S. statements are "regrettable" for different reasons, MP Kobakhidze noted, adding that "unfortunately, both embassies were given incorrect legal analyses."

The ruling party chair also asserted that the proposed change over the selection of the chief prosecutor was a "legal nonsense," which needed appropriate assessment, including by international partners.

"The proposed change would worsen existing norm, this is two-times-two-equaling-four," MP Kobakhidze asserted (*Civil.ge, September 7, 2021*).

#### **13. Supreme Court Rules 10-Year Jail for Ex-Defense Minister**

The Supreme Court of Georgia today sentenced 10 years in prison in absentia for UNM-era Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili over the case of embezzling over EUR 5 million, Kezerashvili's defense lawyer Giorgi Gelkhauri confirmed to *Civil.ge*. As per the amnesty Kezerashvili's sentence will be halved, however.

The ruling by the three-judge panel of Shalva Tadumadze, Levan Tevzadze and Merab Gabinashvili, which overturns 2017 acquittal decision of the Court of Appeals, is yet to be published. Tadumadze back then served as Prosecutor General.

Kezerashvili, who is 51% shareholder of Georgian Dream government-critical Formula TV, dismissed today the sentence as politically motivated, noting he will

appeal the "shameful" ruling in the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights (*September 7, 2021*).

#### **14. Man arrested for murder of Australian citizen Shanae Brooke Edwards in Tbilisi**

Georgian law enforcers have arrested a 33-year-old man for the murder of Australian citizen Shanae Brooke Edwards in Tbilisi at the end of July.

The Georgian Interior Ministry has stated that the Georgian citizen living in Tbilisi, identified only as R.M., was arrested yesterday. DNA samples taken from the murder scene and R.M. point to his involvement.

The ministry said that more than 200 individuals have been questioned and DNA samples of the suspect have been sent to 194 foreign states.

The ministry did not say whether Brooke Edwards was raped before her death, but the Deputy Head of Tbilisi police department Kakha Muradashvili said at the press-briefing that "the body of a young woman was found with traces of violence" (*Agenda.ge, September 8, 2021*).

#### **15. Local media names Georgian citizen Rafael Mursakulovi as the suspect in Shanae Brooke Edwards's murder**

Local Rustavi 2 TV has reported that Georgian citizen living in Tbilisi Rafael Mursakulovi is the man who was detained for Australian citizen Shanae Brooke Edwards' murder.

Reportedly, Mursakulovi lives on the same Gogebashvili street in Vera district where the Australian woman lived before she was found dead in late July.

Rafael Mursakulovi is quite active in social media and has accounts on Facebook and Instagram. He is indicating Georgian Dream as an employer on Facebook. Reportedly he was appointed as the member of Precinct Election Commission by the ruling party several days after the murder. He can be seen in the photo with the member of GD Irakli Zarkua as a supporter.

On this occasion MP Zarkua published a facebook post where he is saying that among thousands of supporters of Georgian Dream it is impossible to know what they are doing therefore, him being supporter of the ruling party means nothing as everyone is equal under the principles of rule of law and this person will be charged with sentence respective to the committed crime.

Mursakulov himself does not plead guilty and exercises his right to silence (*Agenda.ge, Rustavi 2, TV Pirveli, September 8, 2021*).

#### **16. Rustavi 2 case: Prosecutor claims Ex-head Gvaramia's guilt in misuse of funds proved by accountant's testimony**

Georgian prosecutor Zviad Gubeladze who is working on Rustavi 2 case says that the ex-head of the TV channel Nika Gvaramia's guilt in the case of the misuse of the TV station's funds back in 2015 is proved by the testimony of the company's accountant.

Former director general of Rustavi 2 Nika Gvaramia along with former financial director of the TV company Kakhaber Damenia and head of LTD Intermedia Plus Zurab Iashvili were charged with misuse of funds, bribery and fabrication of documents after the Rustavi 2 was returned to its former owner Kibar Khalvashi in July 2019.

Intermedia Plus based on the agreement with Rustavi 2 was obliged to transfer 90-95 per cent of the profit gained from commercials to Rustavi 2 and retain only

the remaining 10 or five per cent for its service.

Gubeladze states that Rustavi 2's accountant saw signs of a possible crime after studying the TV station's revenues and informed the prosecutor about it (*Agenda.ge, September 8, 2021*).

### **17. Gakharia, Georgian Dream Leaders Trade Accusations**

#### **Gakharia's Remarks**

In an interview with TV Pirveli, a channel critical to the GD government, the former Prime Minister said on September 3 that the primary reason for his resignation in February was not the case of opposition leader Nika Melia, but his realization that the GD leadership was "not willing to put state interests above party interests."

Gakharia argued that the Georgian Dream will dissolve after October 2 elections. When the ruling party possesses no resources to govern the country in a dignified manner, and the opposition has no resources to withstand the government, the status quo will change, he asserted.

The former PM said GD has lost the connection to the ideals with which it entered politics, also adding that the ruling party's ambitions "went into space."

Continuing on the elections, former PM said Samtskhe-Javakheti Governor Besik Amiranashvili put political pressure on one of his supporter's mother and aunt in Akhaltsikhe and dismissed them from their jobs.

He then went on to suggest that snap parliamentary elections in 2022 are in the best interest of the GD so that to maintain its supporters' base and to share its responsibility with other political forces.

#### **PM Garibashvili Responds**

"I will remind Gakharia from here, that I gave him a name already and so did everyone, including the party founder [Bidzina Ivanishvili]. Every citizen knows what he did – it is betrayal what he did," the Prime Minister, Irakli Garibashvili responded to his predecessor the next day.

Responding to Gakharia's remarks on the "destruction" of the institutions, Garibashvili said former PM's refusal to execute the law by resigning over Melia's detention amounted to weakening the prime minister's institution. "He fled like a child and resigned for police not to arrest Melia."

Garibashvili continued that while serving as the Minister of Interior Gakharia carried out "an incomprehensible special operation in nightclubs, ravaged people, and afterwards — as you have seen people in clubs insulted policemen multiple times — he got out to apologize to the [clubgoer] people, including those that he called drug addicts." "This represented diminishing the institution." (*Civil.ge, September 8, 2021*)

### **18. Garibashvili, NDI's Madelaine Albright Meet Online**

PM Irakli Garibashvili met online with Madelaine Albright, the National Democratic Institute chair and NDI delegation to discuss upcoming elections. According to the Georgian Government's press service, PM Garibashvili pledged the Government will ensure peaceful and transparent environment for the local polls. NDI started earlier in September high-level meetings ahead of October 2 elections, "aiming to demonstrate support for Georgia's democratic development and European and Euro-Atlantic integration and reinforce the international community's expectation for adherence by all to the principles of genuine democratic elections and political processes." (*Civil.ge, September 8, 2021*)

### **19. European Georgia Talks “Politically Motivated” Court Case**

European Georgia chair Giga Bokeria said the party’s Zugdidi majoritarian candidate Batu Shellia has been called to court over a “fabricated” case. Bokeria stated that Shelia was initially charged in April 2020 but “the case was so absurd it had been shelved since.” The European Georgia leader did not specify the details on the case, however (*Civil.ge, September 8, 2021*).

### **20. “Drug Test War” between Kaladze and Gakharia**

Several days ago Kakha Kaladze, Mayoral Candidate from the ruling party has addressed all oppositional candidates to pass drug tests and demonstrate that they are “clean”. He presented his clean results afterwards.

On September 8, Kobkhidze, Chairman of Georgian Dream called on Gakharia to pass the test immediately “... delaying means that he is trying to get the desirable result by buying time.”

Meanwhile expert Mshvenieradze, former head of the Georgian Democracy Initiative said that GD probably has a compromising material on former PM Giorgi Gakharia, about possible drug use, which could be published a few days prior to the election on so called “Ukrainian Wikileaks”.

Gakharia himself two days ago on Rustavi 2 confirmed his intention to pass the “drug test” as soon as he has a time. It’s worth to mention that the journalist opened and finished the interview with the question on the drug test. Additionally, recently Rustavi 2 had been target of critic for changing editorial policy into pro-governmental and several anchors left the media outlet.

On the other hand, in terms of pre-election campaign the focus is redirected to this particular case as Gakharia was the one who initiated legalization of Marijuana in Georgia after the decision of the Constitutional Court. As the Minister of Internal Affairs, Gakharia registered law on legalizing consumption of marijuana and production for medical purposes. The law did not go to the plenary sessions as the Patriarchate mediated to stop further discussions on this topic. Back than rumors were saying that Ivanishvili was personally interested to adopt this law as he was preparing for medical marijuana production in the western Georgia (*Ipn.ge, TV Pirveli, Rustavi 2, September 8, 2021*).

### **❖ COVID-19**

### **21. Public transport to resume, sports competitions permissible without spectators in Georgia**

Public transport in all large Georgian cities will resume operations from September 13 while sports competitions in the country will be held without spectators in attendance, Chief of the Operational Staff of the Interagency Coordination Council Giorgi Gibradze announced today.

“Sports competitions will be held without spectators. All participants must be either vaccinated or have a PCR test conducted within 72 hours or a rapid antigen test in the last 24 hours,” Gibradze said (*Agenda.ge, September 7, 2021*).

### **22. Georgia starts 2.8 mln GEL lottery to boost Covid-19 vaccination rates**

The government of Georgia has decided to introduce a 2.8 million GEL lottery in order to encourage citizens to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

The lottery will start on September 13 and will be drawn on a daily basis on the website [www.stopcov.lotto.ge](http://www.stopcov.lotto.ge) at 12:00 p.m. until the end of the year, offering 100 and 500 GEL prizes.

Weekly raffles will have prizes of 1,000, 1,500, 5,000 and 10,000 GEL. The final raffle will be held on December 31 and the prize fund will be 100,000 GEL (*Agenda.ge, September 7, 2021*).

### **23. Georgia launches Covid-19 vaccine application with QR code reader**

The Ministry of Health of Georgia has developed an application to read QR codes containing information about an individual's PCR test results of the past 72 hours, whether an individual has recovered from Covid-19 in the past six months and how many doses of the Covid-19 vaccine a citizen has received (*Agenda.ge, September 7, 2021*).

### **24. Red Cross to donate 100,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccine to Georgia**

on September 11, Georgian Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze has stated today. Registration for the batch will open on September 13.

A total of 1,366,678 people are vaccinated in Georgia as of September 8, out of which 856 956 have received one dose of Covid-19 vaccine, while 509,722 have received two doses of vaccine (*Agenda.ge, September 8, 2021*).

### **25. Children over 12 with chronic diseases will be able to receive Covid-19 vaccines in Georgia**

Children over 12 year of age with chronic diseases will soon be able to receive Covid-19 vaccines in Georgia, pediatrician and National Immunisation Board member Temur Mikeladze has stated today.

“With the permission of the family doctor and parent, any child with chronic diseases will be able to receive a Covid-19 vaccine in Georgia... I'm aware of several cases when 12 and 15 year old children with chronic diseases were fully-vaccinated against Covid-19.... No serious vaccine side effects have occurred so far”, said Mikeladze (*Agenda.ge, September 8, 2021*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

### **26. Annual Inflation Hits 10-Year High at 12.8% in August**

Georgia's annual inflation rate in August spiked at 12.8%, another ten-year high following the 11.9% recorded last month, the National Statistics Office (Geostat) reported today. On a monthly basis, meanwhile, consumer prices increased by 0.7 percent.

The annual inflation rate was primarily driven by price changes in transport (22.5% increase), food and non-alcoholic beverages (16.2% increase), housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (11.6% increase) and health (10.9% increase) (*Civil.ge, September 3, 2021*).

### **27. Georgia to receive \$286 million in reserve asset from IMF**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved a general allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) equivalent to \$650 billion of which Georgia will receive SDR 202 million which is equivalent to \$286 million.

“IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said that this is a historic decision and the largest SDR allocation in the history of the IMF and ‘a shot in the arm for the global economy at a time of unprecedented crisis’.

The SDR allocation will benefit all members, address the long-term global need for reserves, build confidence, and foster the resilience and stability of the global economy. It will particularly help our most vulnerable countries struggling to cope with the impact of the Covid-19 crisis,” Georgieva said (*Agenda.ge, September 7, 2021*).

## **❖ Occupied Territories**



## **28. Russian Delegation Visits Sokhumi**

Russian Deputy Economy Minister Dmitry Volvach and Deputy Energy Minister Evgeniy Grabchak arrived in Sokhumi on September 2, where they met with Moscow-backed Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania and "prime minister" Alexander Ankvab, among others.

According to Sokhumi-based Apsnypress media outlet, during the meeting, Bzhania stressed the importance of Russian investments for creating a common space for socio-economic development under the 2014 Russo-Abkhaz "Treaty of Alliance and Strategic Partnership."

"We cannot do without Russian support and investment in infrastructure," Bzhania was cited as saying, and requesting greater coverage of the 2022-25 program for Abkhazia's socio-economic development, currently in works.

Bzhania noted the new program is supposed to cover the development of road infrastructure, electricity, gas and water supply, sewerage, restoration of the airport and railways, and others, according to Apsnypress (*Civil.ge, September 3, 2021*).

## **29. Abkhaz District Head Talks Gali Passportization**

Sokhumi-appointed head of Gali district, Konstantin Pilia said it is a "disaster" that the absolute majority of the overwhelmingly ethnic-Georgian district does not hold Abkhaz passports.

"Anyone who sincerely wants to be a citizen, a patriot of Abkhazia, should be given a chance," Pilia asserted, marking a stark contrast to the previous Abkhaz administration that favored stricter regime for Gali Georgians.

"We are creating an Achilles' heel, and I don't know why we are doing it," Pilia told Sputnik Abkhazia, Russian news agency, in an August 20 interview, asked to comment on only a thousand of about 30,000 Gali residents holding Abkhaz passports.

Pilia said while he agrees that Georgian passport holders should not be entitled to the Abkhaz "citizenship," the problem arises as the central Georgian government does not allow Gali residents to give up their passports for Abkhaz citizenship, as the region is unrecognized (*Civil.ge, September 3, 2021*).

## **30. EU Calls for Reopening Tskhinvali Crossing Points**

European Union Ambassador to Georgia, Carl Hartzell called on authorities in Tskhinvali and Russia on September 5 to reopen all crossing points at Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia occupation line, in an address marking the two-year anniversary of the closing of the Odzisi crossing point by Moscow-backed South Ossetian authorities.

Noting that the EU Monitoring Mission is ready to facilitate further relevant discussions within the framework of the Ergneti IPRM, Ambassador Hartzell said the EU is confident adequate COVID-19 testing strategy could be implemented to allow greater freedom of movement (*Civil.ge, September 6, 2021*).

## **31. Arbitrarily Detained American Released from Tskhinvali Custody**

Jackson Paul Kramer, a U.S. citizen arbitrarily detained by the Russian occupying forces of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, has been released to Tbilisi-controlled territory, the State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) reported today.

The SSG said Kramer had been detained in Java district, deep into the occupied region. The authorities did not specify when the detention took place.

Kramer, a tourist, said he was attempting to cross the Caucasus Mountains

toward the Black Sea, but was not aware he had crossed the dividing line between the occupied region and Georgia proper (*Civil.ge, September 6, 2021*).

### **32. Military drills underway in Russian occupied Tskhinvali**

Tank units from the fourth Russian military base are taking part in military exercises in the Russian occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region, Radio Liberty Georgian service reports.

30 tank units participated in the drills which involved the destruction of moving targets.

Unmanned aerial vehicles were used during the exercises. They fired at a distance of 300 to 2,000 meters from the artillery installations," the press service of Russian Southern Military District reports.

A total of four bilateral battalions and one regiment are conducting tactical exercises in the Stavropol Krai, Rostov region, the Chechen Republic, the Volgograd region and the Crimea.

About 10,000 servicemen and 800 pieces of combat equipment are involved in the exercises including tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, artillery pieces and anti-aircraft missile systems (*Agenda.ge, September 8, 2021*).

## **Foreign Affairs & Security**

### **33. Georgian, Norwegian FMs Talk Kabul Evacuation, Vaccine Availability**

Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide phoned her Georgian counterpart David Zalkaliani on September 2, discussing Afghanistan evacuations and COVID-19 pandemic situation in Georgia, the Georgian Foreign Ministry reported today.

The Norwegian FM acknowledged the "special contribution" of Georgia in managing the emergency evacuation flights of civilians and military personnel from Afghanistan and wide-scale humanitarian activities, according to the Georgian Foreign Ministry (*Civil.ge, September 2, 2021*).

### **34. U.S. Congressmen, Georgian FM Discuss Defense, Security, Trade Ties**

The delegation of the U.S. House of Representatives met Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani on the second day of their September 6-8 trip to Georgia. The delegation includes lawmakers Alexander Xavier Mooney (R-WV), Bryan George Steil (R-WI), Kelly Michael Armstrong (R-ND), Carol Devine Miller (R-WV), and Ronald Gene Estes (R-KS).

According to the Georgian MFA, at the meeting the parties paid particular attention to deepening U.S.-Georgia cooperation in the fields of defense and security, as well as trade and economy. The sides also stressed the importance of the involvement of the U.S. in enhancing security in the Black Sea and South Caucasus region.

The parties, MFA press release noted, also addressed the importance of attracting more U.S. investments to Georgia and the role of Congress in the negotiation of the US-Georgia Free Trade Agreement (*Civil.ge, September 7, 2021*).

### **35. Parliament Speaker Kuchava Visits Vienna**

Georgian Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava is visiting Vienna on September 7-9, where is attending the Fifth International Conference of Parliament Speakers, while also holding bilateral meetings.

In the Austrian capital, Georgian Parliamentary Chair already met with President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Margareta Cederfelt , discussing upcoming October 2 local elections in Georgia.

Speaker Kuchava, together with Parliamentary Foreign Committee Chair Nikoloz Samkharadze had a meeting with President of the Estonian Parliament Jüri Ratas as well (*Civil.ge, September 7, 2021*).

### **36. Georgian, Armenian PMs pledge to create new opportunities for regional stability**

The Georgian and Armenian Prime ministers have pledged in Tbilisi to intensify ties and cooperation to create new opportunities which will decrease tension and risks of conflicts in the region.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili hosted his Armenian counterpart Nikol Pashinyan earlier today and stated that 'stability in Armenia is crucial for Georgia and for regional peace.'

"Peace, stability and welfare are the three words I would use to describe our joint regional goals," Garibashvili said at a press conference with Pashinyan.

He stated that Pashinyan's vision is for the sustainable development of Armenia and that 'he will bring success and development' to the Armenian people'.

"Our joint efforts should be targeted for ensuring new opportunities, development and peace for the region. Unfortunately, there are still many unresolved conflicts in the region," Garibashvili said (*Agenda.ge, September 8, 2021*).