

Protest



17

MAY

15:58 UTC

Georgia Tactical: Opposition Droa to hold protests at First Republic Square, TBS Airport in Tbilisi at 12:00 (local time) on May 19; maintain vigilance

Please be advised:

- Elene Khoshtaria, the leader of the opposition Droa, announced that an anti-government protest will take place at First Republic Square in Tbilisi at 12:00 (local time) on May 19. Koshtaria also announced that protesters will head to the Tbilisi International Airport (TBS) with convoys following the gathering.
- The demonstration will be held to denounce the Georgian Dream (GD)-led administration's support for the restoration of direct flights between Georgia and Russia and will coincide with the first Moscow-Tbilisi flight operated by the Russian Azimut Airline, which will land at TBS on the day.
- The Georgian Civil Aviation Agency issued a permit for the Russian airline to operate daily flights following Russian President Vladimir Putin's May 10 abolition of the visa regime for Georgian nationals and the ban on direct flights imposed in 2019.
- Pro-Western opposition parties accused the ruling GD of "threatening Georgia's European future" and allege that the country may face international isolation.
- A Droa-led protest march was also reported from the Parliament to the Georgian Airways office on May 16.



Assessments:

1. The turnout in the protest will likely reach the low to mid hundred based on participation recorded on May 16 and considering the sustained anti-Russian sentiment among a segment of the population. The prevailing perception pertaining to the GD-led government's pro-Russia stance further corroborates the likelihood of such a turnout. Participation is liable to be bolstered if additional supporters of pro-Europe parties join the gathering, such as the United National Movement (UNM), Strategy Aghmashenebeli, and European Georgia, or activist groups such as the "Shame Movement."
2. Security measures will likely be bolstered at First Republic Square and TBS to monitor the crowd movement, given the sensitive nature of the latter. The anti-government stance of the gathering, coupled with the authorities' low tolerance for such protests will likely heighten the risk of clashes to erupt between protesters and the authorities, especially if the former attempt to disrupt the airport's entrances. In this case, the police will adopt forcible dispersal measures, such as water cannons or temporarily arrest protesters. Pedestrian and vehicular travel disruptions are likely given the expected turnout and the related security measures during the protest hours.

Recommendations:

Those operating or residing in Tbilisi on May 19 are advised to maintain vigilance in the vicinity of the aforementioned locations due to the slated protests and associated risk of unrest while allotting for traffic disruptions.