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BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

USA Today has published an article by US Senator Jeanne Shaheen ahead of the meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The article touches upon Russia's expanding influence in Belarus, Ukraine, and South Caucasian region. Noting that Belarusian "dictator" Alexander Lukashenko is strongly supported by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Shaheen states that "Putin's ambition to unite Belarus and Russia into a single state and expand his authoritarian reach cannot be ignored."

According to the senator, Russia's first steps to undermine democracy in Eastern Europe started with the Republic of Georgia. Shaheen states that while she was visiting Georgia, she arrived at the "administrative boundary line" that separates 20% of Russian-occupied Georgian territories from the rest of Georgia.

"Here, Russian forces try to intimidate Georgians by occasionally moving the fence marking the line and hindering movement of Georgian citizens across the line, preventing access to essential services," stresses the US senator, adding that Russia also hinders the activities of the European Union's monitoring mission, and engages in disinformation campaigns against Georgia's democracy.

Shaheen is also concerned over Russia's increased activity in the Black Sea and does not rule out that Russia might take action against Ukraine this fall.

The senator suggests steps that should be undertaken to stop Russian oppression. She emphasizes the need to consider NATO

We need to seriously consider NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia, says US Senator Jeanne Shaheen



► "Russia's first play to subvert democracy in Eastern Europe started with the Republic of Georgia," says US Senator Jeanne Shaheen.

membership for Ukraine and Georgia.

"Both want to join, 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," reads US senator's article.

The senator also suggests stopping the construction of Nord Stream 2, which is a pipeline running from Russia to Europe across the Baltic Sea. This project would allow Russia to stop the transit of gas through Ukraine, and since being Russia's gatekeeper to the European gas market is crucial geopolitical leverage to Ukraine, ending gas transit will seriously affect the country. Many believe that

Putin is deliberately trying to weaken Ukraine by depriving the country of substantial revenues to assure its own strategic advantage.

Shaheen believes that the US needs to strengthen its military as well as a diplomatic presence in the region. "Promoting business and investment ties with Ukraine and Georgia would benefit both our countries, as well," she stressed.



► "Putin's ambition to unite Belarus and Russia into a single state and expand his authoritarian reach cannot be ignored," stresses US senator.

OSCE Secretary General meets Georgian leaders

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

According to the government and The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, who is paying a visit to Georgia held official meetings with Georgian leaders and attended the 100th Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) in Ergneti.

According to the government administration, during the meeting with PM Irakli Gharibashvili, they discussed issues of cooperation between Georgia and the OSCE. The OSCE's significant involvement in the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Georgia and the restoration of trust between the war-torn population was underlined. The PM thanked the OSCE Secretary General for her efforts in this direction. The role of the OSCE Co-Chairs in the Geneva International Talks and in the format of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism was emphasized as well.

Gharibashvili spoke about raising the issue of immediate and unconditional release of Zaza Gakheladze and all other illegally detained Georgian citizens at all levels, including in the format of IPRM. The PM stressed that despite the difficult security and humanitarian challenges, the Government of Georgia remains committed to the peaceful settlement of the conflict and the process of democratic development of the country.

In addition, Gharibashvili said that the Georgian side appreciates the involvement of the ODIHR in the election observation process. He expressed readiness for the country to receive the maximum number of ODIHR observers in the upcoming local elections, this fall.

The meeting also focused on the active role of the Government Administration's Human Rights Secretariat and its involvement in OSCE-organized activities on human rights and gender.

According to the administration, the OSCE Secretary General praised Georgia's mediation in the Caucasus and the involvement of the PM in this regard. Note that with the active facilitation of Gharibashvili and the involvement of Philip Reeker, the Azerbaijani side released 15 Armenian citizens detained during the conflict.



► Ahead of meeting with Georgian authorities OSCE Secretary General travelled the village of Tsitsagiantskari near the Russian-controlled Tskhinvali region.

The President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili met with the OSCE SecGen at the Orbeliani Palace. They agreed to hold a conference of women leaders in Georgia (the role of women in peace and security). The parties discussed the forthcoming local elections and stressed the importance of the participation of election observation missions, especially the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission.

The issue of the occupied territories of Georgia, the deteriorating humanitarian situation as a result of the closure of checkpoints in the occupied territories by the de facto regime, as well as human rights violations and abductions, in particular the case of Zaza Gakheladze were discussed at the meeting. Talks focused on the importance of strengthening the Geneva International Talks

and increasing the effectiveness of the format. Georgian Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava discussed with the OSCE SecGen Russia's actions and the "dire humanitarian situation" in Georgia's occupied regions. The sides also reviewed the situation in the region, stressing Georgia's role in ensuring regional peace and stability.

During the meeting, Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani ex-

pressed concern over the intensification of Russia's aggressive politics in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region. He also briefed Secretary General Schmid on Moscow's steps towards the illegal annexation of Georgian regions, including borderization processes, the common socio-economic space program with Sokhumi, free movement-related restrictions, and gross human rights violations, among others.

At the IPRM meeting in Ergneti, Schmid, and the Director of Security and Defence Policy at the European External Action Service, Joanneke Balfoort, delivered introductory remarks during the opening session. They praised the commitment of the participants and noted the need to resolve issues of common interest in a constructive and pragmatic manner. They highlighted that the importance of dialogue in a conflict setting must not be taken for granted, but should be nurtured and used to stabilize the security of the conflict-affected population.

The secretary General stressed the need to continue engaging with all stakeholders: "It is a special moment for me to be here today, having been closely involved in setting up this mechanism. It remains crucial for defusing tensions and solving concrete security and humanitarian issues, and also to alleviate the burden of the conflict-affected people."



► Secretary General Schmid participated in 100th Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Ergneti.

THURSDAY JUNE 17

Day Sunny
High: 30°C

Night Clear
Low: 18°C

FRIDAY JUNE 18

Day Mainly sunny
High: 34°C

Night Clear
Low: 20°C

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Life and Death – The Glorious Pompeii

THE TREASURE OF POMPEII TO BE DISPLAYED IN VANI ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

In July-August 2021, the treasure of Pompeii will be on display at the Vani Archaeological Museum. The exhibition – Life and Death – The Glorious Pompeii will be organized by the Georgian National Museum and the Italian Embassy in Georgia. For the first time in Georgia, this exhibition will present the history of Pompeii, the glorious ancient Roman city buried in ash as a result of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on August 24, 79 A.D. Pompeii, as a well-preserved city, has become one of the main sources for the study of ancient culture since its discovery in 1748.

Life and Death – The Glorious Pompeii will be the first non-permanent exhibition hosted by the renovated Vani Archeological Museum, which was completed in 2020 after a 10-year remodeling. Visitors will be able to explore a variety of archaeological materials from the Archaeological Park of Pompeii.

The wide range of the artifacts will illustrate the magnificent past of the city and the features of the wealthy Roman lifestyle. Famous paintings of Pompeii, frescos, miniature marble statues that adorned the gardens of Pompeii's luxury villas, subtle glass crockery, bronze statues of Roman pantheon gods and mythological characters from larariums (household shrines), a variety of household items such as pottery, silver and bronze cutlery, golden jewelry, and other luxury items are among the objects on display in the museum.

The exhibits will also include petrified dogs and humans covered in ash, as well as the famous embracing Pompeii couple



► The Ambassador of Italy to Georgia, Enrico Valvo visited the renewed Vani Archeological Museum. The ambassador was hosted by the director of the museum, David Lortkipanidze.

symbolizing the tragic end of the ancient city.

It is symbolic that the museum in Vani, a historical town introduced to the international communities of archaeology and history as "Georgia's Pompeii" – is the venue to host Life and Death. Vani une Pompéi géorgienne is the name of David Lordkipanidze's book, published in 1995 in France. Vani, which was the main religious center of the Kingdom of Colchis in the VIII-I centuries BC was also severely destroyed by the enemy.



► The exhibition will be hosted at the museum in Vani, a historical town introduced to the international communities as 'Georgia's Pompeii'.

Today, viewing the ruins of a Vani temple-city allows you to travel back in time, and the archaeological artifacts displayed at the Vani museum will, for the most part, bring the magnificent past of these two remarkable cities to life.

The exhibition is the result of collaboration between the Georgian and Italian institutions. In 2017-2019, organized by the Georgian National Museum and the Embassy of Italy in Georgia, the National Gallery featured the masterpieces of the most important artists of Italian Renaissance and Baroque, modernism and postmodernism, including Michelangelo Buonarroti, Sandro Botticelli, Titian Vecellio, Raphael Sanzio, Lorenzo Bernini, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giorgio de Chirico and others.

The exhibition is supported by TBC Bank, Business and Technology University (BTU), and Tsinandali Estate.

First Biosphere Reserve established in Dedoplistskaro, Georgia, with EU support

On 10 June, the Biosphere Reserve Tourism Information Centre and Bird Watching Tower in the region of Kakheti were opened to mark International Biodiversity Day. Both locations as part of the EU-funded 'Establishment of Vashlovani Biosphere Reserve in Kakheti Region as a Model for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth' project by Dedoplistskaro Municipality in partnership with REC Caucasus and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA).

The biosphere reserve includes the Vashlovani Protected Area located in Dedoplistskaro. However, unlike the protected area, there are fewer restric-



tions in a biosphere reserve and, therefore, more space for economic activities, while ensuring nature protection. The new status of the territory will allow local inhabitants in Dedoplistskaro to maintain and protect the environment while getting involved in sustainable businesses.

"These sites will clearly encourage the development of nature-oriented tourism, as well as supporting protection of the environment and economic development of the local population," said Nikoloz Janiashvili, Mayor of Dedoplistskaro.

The Bird Watching Tower, which is located in Koghote Gorge, will allow tourists to observe the birds in the gorge using special observation equipment.