

US Ambassador Kelly Dignan says Georgian Parliament can suspend appointment of Supreme Court judges



By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Dignan has stated that the Georgian Parliament has the power to suspend the appointment of the Supreme Court judges and uphold the EU-brokered April agreement between government and opposition.

"I am very pleased that the judges have commented that they are ready to work with everyone to improve the judiciary. The US and international partners have been helping Georgia for the last 25 years, because the rule of law, an impartial judiciary is a prerequisite for NATO and EU membership", Ambassador Dignan said.

Kelly Dignan added that both the United States and the

country's other international partners have actively been supporting Georgia's improvements in the field of justice as it a necessary precondition for the eventual EU and NATO integration. Earlier this week, 310 Georgian judges issued a joint letter condemning the "politically motivated and unhealthy processes" that undermine Georgia's judiciary.

On June 17, the High Council of Justice nominated nine candidates for the Supreme Court. In particular, Giorgi Gogiashvili, Gocha Abuseridze, Levan Tevzadze, Ketevan Meskhishvili, Giorgi Shavliashvili, Revaz Nadaraia, Bidzina Sturua, Eka Zarnadze, Lasha Gochiashvili.

According to the EU-brokered agreement of April 19, under the current rule,

High Council of Justice should have refrained from appointing judges to the Supreme Court. However, it is indicated that the draft law on appointment to the Supreme Court should be submitted to the Parliament, which will take into account the conclusion of the Venice Commission published in 2019, open voting in the High Council of Justice and the need to substantiate the latter's nominations.

There should also be substantial reform of the High Council of Justice for transparency, integrity and credibility, including appointments, evaluations, promotions, transfers, measures and complaints to the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR and the ODIHR which must be fully performed.

28 MEPs call on Georgia to defend the Pride March

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

In a joint June 28 address coming ahead of the Pride celebrations slated for July 1-5 in capital Tbilisi city, members of the European Parliament's LGBTIQ+ Group are urging Georgia to adhere to the dignity march and ensure that its obligations under the Association Agreement are met.

The addressee of the letter, which is signed by 28 MPs, is the Minister of Internal Affairs, Vakhtang Gomelauri. Along with Gomelauri, the addressees are EU Ambassador Carl Hartzel and Joseph Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

They write that Pride demonstrations are a peaceful tool of political advocacy and one of the ways to materialize the universal right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and an important step for LGBTQ activists and community members to increase their visibility and reach out to the public. It is in this context that they write to Gomelauri, asking "not only that the Pride be held in the name of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, but that

all preparations be made to protect the right of protesters to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly."

MEPs write that the last comment of Irakli Kobakhidze, the chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream party, when he said that in his opinion, the march of dignity should not take place, stating it is against universal human rights.

The signatories also noted that Georgia has commitments under European Convention on Human Rights and the Association Agreement with the EU to tackle discrimination against women, LGBT persons, as well as ethnic and religious minorities. "We have seen how in previous years homophobic groups have taken advantage of these celebrations to build on their hatred and attack LGBTI peaceful protesters.

MEPs also recalled a 2012 decision by the ECHR which recognised that Georgia's failure to protect peaceful demonstrators amounted to a violation of Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) taken in conjunction with Article

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According to the publication of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy, in particular its chapter 4 on "Leading the call for LGBTIQ+ equality around the world", the EU must continue to strengthen its engagement in LGBTIQ+ issues.

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What happens after Pashinyan's victory?

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

On June 20, Pashinyan won the early parliamentary elections in Armenia. The majority of voters in Armenia reaffirmed their support for the leader during whose rule Armenia suffered a heavy defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. However, this support has not diminished the severity of the failure, nor the promises made earlier for the reforms to be carried out.

In the June 20 parliamentary elections, Pashinyan's Civic Pact party won 71 seats and can form a government on its own. The Georgian state and the opposition also congratulated Pashinyan on his victory. According to the statements made by the representatives of the opposition, they were able to hold early elections in Armenia (which the opposition in Georgia has been demanding), in accordance with democratic standards. In this sense, Armenia was considered the leader of the democratic process in the South Caucasus.

However, the defeated political forces in Armenia have their opinion regarding the quality of democracy of the elections. For example, the Kocharyan bloc 'Armenia', which took second place, does not recognize the election results.

After Pashinyan's victory, many predictions are made about his future policies. According to the most 'pink' forecasts, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem can be considered solved and now nothing will hinder the development of Armenia's cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan. For this, Pashinyan will also



make a unilateral compromise. However, the existing reality provides very little basis for such a prediction.

We can name several factors:

1. Armenia maintains part of Nagorno-Karabakh after the 2020 war - about 2,500 square kilometers. The small Armenian population remains there thanks to Russian peacekeepers. Their departure also means the departure of the Armenian population. Ilham Aliyev is no longer talking about any status that the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh will have in Azerbaijan. Will the Armenian society reconcile with the final loss of Nagorno-Karabakh? Will it forgive Pashinyan?

2. After the Karabakh war, a serious border conflict arose be-

tween Azerbaijan and Armenia. Azerbaijani military units in the southern part of Armenia, in several places about 200 sq. km. They occupied the territory and declared that on their maps from the Soviet period it was the territory of Azerbaijan. Pashinyan immediately asked for Putin's help and set up a branch of a Russian military base in southern Armenia (Syunik).

3. After the war in 2020, the Azerbaijan-Turkey union is deepening and from the position of the winner, Armenia is demanded to open a transport corridor, which will connect Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan and Turkey with free movement on the territory of Armenia. At the same time, Armenia maintains a ban on Turkish products

in protest of Turkey's open assistance to Azerbaijan during the war. Armenia has also filed a lawsuit against Turkey at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, accusing it of sending Syrian mercenaries during the war in Azerbaijan and of human rights abuses in Nagorno-Karabakh.

4. Pashinyan promises the Armenian society a wide range of reforms, but he will need to take urgent measures to restore the country's defense capabilities. Today, Armenia's security depends essentially on Russia's military presence. But Armenia seems to be disappointed by Russia. Russia was actively arming Azerbaijan and during the war, Armenia was not provided the assistance it expected. Russian

weapons, which made it impossible to repel Azerbaijani drones, did not work either. It is also important for Armenia to seek Western guarantees of security, which will irritate Russia.

The main task for Georgia in the South Caucasus region remains unchanged - to maintain good neighborly relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the new geopolitical situation in the region after the 2020 war is not entirely clear. In the conditions of the increased influence of Russia and Turkey in the South Caucasus, the activity of the West in the region is important for Georgia.

Georgia welcomed the agreement reached between Armenia and Azerbaijan through the mediation of Georgia and the United States, according to which Azerbaijan released 6 Armenian prisoners of war, and Armenia handed over the maps of the mined fields to Azerbaijan.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said after a visit to the South Caucasus that Russia's influence in the region was growing and that more Europe was needed in the South Caucasus. He said that if Europe does not return to the South Caucasus, there may not be a place to return soon. Humanitarian aid, support for reforms, election monitoring, mediation - such should be the European soft power in the region. The European Union is already fulfilling this mission in relation to Georgia. However, despite the agreement reached through Charles Michel, there are serious differences and controversies among Georgian political forces over its implementation.

News in Brief

PREPARED BY
THE MESSENGER STAFF

Patriarchate urges government to stop supporting Pride Week

In connection with Pride Week, the Patriarchate calls on the authorities to 'avoid destabilizing the country' and 'inevitable stir. In the homophobic

statement, they called on MEPs and embassies to refrain from supporting and encouraging Tbilisi Pride.

In addition, the Patriarchate makes misinformation and discriminatory assessments of the LGBT community and their activities in the statement.

"The organizers of the planned Pride are propagating a non-traditional way of life under the guise of protecting human rights; It contains signs of provocation and conflicts with socially recognized moral norms and aims to legalize grave sin. [...]

We appeal to the 30 members of the European Parliament's LGBTQ+ working group and the heads of embassies accredited in Georgia to refrain from supporting and encouraging Tbilisi Pride."

On June 28, 28 MEPs issued a statement calling on the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Government of Georgia to effectively and properly protect the participants of the Tbilisi Pride, to ensure the universal right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

WizzAir to resume operating in Kutaisi

According to the Ministry of Economy, Wizz Air will resume flights to Milan, Prague, Athens, Thessaloniki, Larnaca and Memmingen during the summer navigation season.

According to them, flights until the end of the season will be performed once a week. Airline tickets are already available on the company's website.

"At this stage, direct flights from Kutaisi to Europe will be available in 14 destinations in 9 countries. In July, 153 direct flights will be operated from Kutaisi International Airport. Of these, 111 direct flights will be

operated to Europe and 42 to Central Asia. WizzAir as well as FLYARYSTAN plans to gradually increase both directions and frequencies during summer," the ministry said.



Weather

Wednesday, June 30

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 35°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 21°C

Thursday, July 1

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 35°C

Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 22°C

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UNICEF in Georgia: Our priority is to have children return to their biological families

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

Representative of the United Nations Children's Fund in Georgia, Amy Clancy has announced that the organization's main priority is reintegration of children back to their biological families, and if that is not possible, they should be transferred to the alternative forms of care, such as foster families.

"When it comes to the small family homes, this should be our last resort, and can only be used as a temporary measure in order to have children finally return to their homes. It is also very important that children have access to a proper upbringing. UNICEF is ready to provide the relevant assistance in order to prevent children from being separated from their families", Clancy said.

On Monday, the Public Defender of Georgia Nino Lomjaria was admitted to the Patriarchate's Ninotsminda Boarding School for the first time since 2018, following the accusations of physical and sexual abuse at the facility. The Ombudsman was accompanied by the new head of the facility,



Archbishop Iakob, and the lawyer of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Edisher Karchava. Lomjaria was allowed to Boarding School after she met with Archbishop Iakob on June 17.

According to Lomjaria, cur-

rently, there are 15 children in the boarding school, while 20 have already left per the decision of the court and have been sent back to their families or placed in family-type care facilities. The Public Defender believes that all

of the children should now be relocated to the alternative care facilities as they now have an opportunity to 'express their will freely'.

The scandal around Ninotsminda orphanage has es-

calated after the repeated reports of the abuse against children residing there and the inability of social workers and representatives of the Ombudsman's office to enter the facility for monitoring.

28 MEPs call on Georgia to defend the Pride March

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14 (prohibition of discrimination). The case pertained to a peaceful demonstration in celebration of the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and Interphobia and applicants complained that the police authorities had failed to protect them from violent counter-protesters and to investigate the incident, namely the discriminatory motive behind it.

Parliamentarians noted that since then Georgia has invested in capacity-building training to police officers on hate crime and hate-speech in partnership for instance with the CoE, which has led no doubt to their improved awareness, knowledge and capacity. "We are certain that these trainings will bear results in providing the necessary support to the upcoming Pride events," the letter reads, asking the EU Delegation in Georgia to follow up on the elements raised above.

Georgian far-right, pro-Russian, violent and homophobic groups in Georgia, and those affiliated with the newly founded ultraconservative movement ERI, have announced plans to mobilize in parallel with the organizers of the Pride and hold a counter-rally during the July 5.

The Public Defender calls on

the Ministry of Internal Affairs to take preventive steps to ensure that all manifestations of violence during the Tbilisi Pride March are insured and all citizens can express their position peacefully.

The Charles Michel Michel Reform Group invites the Minister of Internal Affairs to the Parliament to listen to Gomelauri explain how the state intends to ensure the security of Tbilisi Pride Week.

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan told Tbilisi Pride Week that Georgia has been fighting for human rights for years, and it is unfortunate that some people want to use violence to violate fundamental human rights, such as the right to free assembly and expression.

According to her, in a democratic country, people have the right to express their will. "All this creates a serious problem for law enforcement agencies, which have an obligation to protect people, the right to free assembly, to express their opinions. In a democracy, people have a fundamental right to express their will," Degan said.

According to Tbilisi Mayor and gen-sec of Georgian Dream, Kakha Kaladze, holding pride week is not appropriate, because there are specific people, specific groups who can misuse it, both

on one side and on the other, however, he says that freedom of expression is protected in the country and one wouldn't be able to bring a single case to prove otherwise.

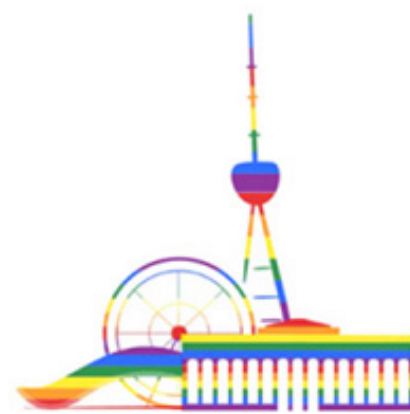
Aleko Elisashvili, a former Tbilisi mayoral candidate and a member of the Georgian parliament, is calling on LGBTQ human rights activists to restrain from holding March. "Why is this pride being held, which has no result other than hatred and a revival of pro-Russian forces? I just do not understand it ... if they restrain themselves, it will

be very good," he said.

Recall that In 2019, LGBTIQ+ Pride Week was planned for the first time in Tbilisi, which was supposed to be crowned with a 'march of honor' on any street in the city. The organizers immediately had a communication with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which, as they said, first advised the activists to march indoors, and then could not guarantee their safety at all.

At the same time, the Orthodox Church called on the authorities not to allow a parade in Tbilisi. Levan Vasadze, a

businessman known for his homophobic sentiments and founder of ERI, said that Tbilisi was forming 'self-organized groups' against Pride and its supporters. Against the background of lack of guarantees, Tbilisi Pride activists held a partisan march in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs building. 2 years later, the church has addressed Georgian officials with the same request and it is unknown whether the organizers will be able to hold the Pride safely.



TBILISI
PRIDE



Tbilisi Pride events are planned for July 1-5, including a screening of a documentary, Pride Festival and March of Honor.