

We're Failing to See Objective Reasons for Dismantlement of State Inspector service, EU Ambassador Says

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell has commented in response to media requests on 15 February decisions in Parliament regarding the appointments to the bodies to replace the State Inspector's Service and the termination of parliamentary mandates.

Regarding the ruling party's replacement of the State Inspector Service with two new services, the Ambassador stated that he had failed to see objective reasons for the unexpected dismantlement of the original body last December or the early termination of the mandate of the State Inspector. It is noteworthy that foreign diplomats in Georgia, as well as NGOs and the opposition had called on the ruling party to pause the process of replacing the outgoing service, and called for consultations over the initiative.

"Effective democratic oversight of the security sector and proper safeguarding of data protection remain Georgian commitments for which it will be held accountable, Ambassador Hartzell noted.

The Parliament of Georgia appointed Karlo Katsitadze and Lela Janashvili to lead the Special Investigation Service and Personal Data Protection Services on Tuesday, the two newly created agencies replacing the State Inspector Service. Ambassador Hartzell noted that while taking note of these recent appointments, the EU would await the outcome of the appeal process currently in the Constitutional Court.

As for the parliament's decision to terminate some opposition mandates, Hartzell commented that the decision would 'arguably' reduce political inclusiveness and democratic pluralism in the legislative body.

"When it comes to the decision to terminate some opposition mandates, a political choice was made yesterday



► "It is essential for the European Union's willingness and ability to support Georgia in key reform areas," EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell stated.



► EU encourages all sides to use the Parliament as the main platform for political debate.

on the basis of principles that I will not debate, but which arguably came at the expense of political inclusiveness and democratic pluralism in Parliament," the statement reads.

According to Irakli Kobakhidze, the chairman of the Georgian Dream, the recent statements of the EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell are not fair and objective. Mamuka Mdinardze, one of the leaders of the Georgian Dream also stated that he disagreed with Ambassador Hartzell's opinion. According to him, the Ambassador stands by Georgia and helps the government in a lot of good deeds, however, Mdinardze noted that Hartzell did not discuss the objective criteria and circumstances underlying this particular decision.

EU Prize for Journalism in Georgia - join livestream on 2 March

On 2 March, the European Union Delegation to Georgia will announce the winners of the EU Prize for Journalism in Georgia, which rewards the highest standards of journalistic ethics, professionalism and quality.

The 10th ceremony will be livestreamed on the EU Delegation Facebook page.

Established by the European Union Delegation to Georgia in 2012, the EU Prize for Journalism encourages professionalism and ethical conduct in Georgian journalism. The Special Prize for

conflict-sensitive journalism rewards media outlets contributing to confidence building and peace and is handed out by the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM).

The winners of the first six categories will receive monetary prizes. The winner of the EUMM Special Prize for Peace Journalism will receive a 30-day fellowship with the Institute of War and Peace Reporting in London.

(eunighbourseast.eu)



EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 2.9934 | EURO - 3.4065 | GBP - 4.0602 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 3.9877 | SWISS FRANC - 3.2361 |

Minister of Defense of Georgia Meets NATO Gen-Sec and US Secretary of Defense

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Georgian Defense Minister Juansher Burchuladze has held meetings with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Military Committee Chair Admiral Rob Bauer, in the framework of the February 16-17 Defense Ministerial in Brussels.

“NATO continues to provide strong political and practical support to both Georgia and Ukraine,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told a meeting of the North Atlantic Council before meeting with the Georgian and Ukrainian defense ministers.

Stoltenberg said that peace and stability are in danger today. According to him, there are signs from Moscow that the talks should continue in the diplomatic sphere. However, he added that there are no signs of Russian withdrawal of troops from Ukraine.

“Russia has once again shown its disregard for the principles of European security and its ability and willingness to threaten to use force to achieve its goals... NATO allies fought tirelessly to resolve the issue through diplomatic means. We have done this through close relations with Georgia and Ukraine. NATO continues to provide political and practical support to Georgia and Ukraine,” Stoltenberg said.

The sides discussed common security challenges and future threats from Russia. Burchuladze spoke about the importance of enhanced NATO involvement in the region amid growing challenges. The meeting focused on the prospects of deepening cooperation and the reforms implemented by the Ministry of Defense, which aim to increase compatibility with NATO.

According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Defense, the focus was on the upcoming NATO-Georgia 2022 joint international military exercise, which will be held in Georgia for the



► At the meeting the constant threat of Russian aggression, the deteriorating security situation in the Black Sea region, the strong political and practical support of NATO for both countries was discussed.



third time this March.

According to Stoltenberg, the allies support Georgia and Ukraine in different directions and this year exercises will be held with Georgia, which will demonstrate joint work, adding that the Black Sea region is of strategic importance for NATO, where Alliance has 3 members and 2 very close partners - Georgia and Ukraine. He emphasized that working closely with them is

important to both them and their partners and their position on the Bucharest Summit decision has not changed. “Currently, the focus is on reform, on modernizing the defense and security institutions of Georgia and Ukraine.”

“We also discussed the presence of Russian forces in the regions of Georgia - Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the Russian Duma vote on the recommendation of the Donetsk and

Lugansk governments to recognize areas not controlled. We all agree that this will be a further clear violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty and the Minsk agreements, which will undermine efforts to find a political solution in the ' Normandy format.”

As Stoltenberg noted, today NATO allies have reaffirmed their strong support for the sovereignty and territorial integ-

ity of Georgia and Ukraine and emphasized that NATO's door remains open.

“Georgia's defense reforms, the level of compatibility of the defense forces and the professionalism of the Georgian military were positively assessed at the meeting,” the Georgian ministry said in a statement.

Minister with Admiral Rob Bauer stressed the importance of the Alliance's firm stance and maintaining its open door policy amid intensifying Russian aggression.

“We discussed our strategic plans and our future and we are united in all issues of principle,” Burchuladze said, adding “NATO will not back off from its goals and decisions and it is our unwavering decision to become a fully-fledged member of the European family.”

Burchuladze also participated in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defense Ministers' session with Georgia and Ukraine on 17th of February. The Ministerial comes amid Russia's military build-up around Ukraine as well as the Kremlin's demands that the Alliance rescinds its 2008 promise that Ukraine and Georgia will eventually become NATO members.

In addition, the Georgian Defense Minister met with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. The sides discussed global security challenges. Burchuladze thanked Lloyd Austin for the strong support and strong position of the US Government on the security of Georgia and Ukraine. The conversation also touched upon the issues of strategic cooperation in the field of defense and security between Georgia and the United States. Special attention was paid to the initiative of Georgia to strengthen defense and deterrence signed between the defense ministries of the two countries, which was signed during the visit of the US Secretary of State to Georgia.

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 18
 Day ☀️ Sunshine High: 12°C
 Night 🌁 Partly Cloudy Low: 0°C
SATURDAY FEBRUARY 19
 Day ☀️ Sunshine High: 14°C
 Night 🌙 Clear Low: 3°C

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