

## State Department: Ambassador Degnan Has Our Full Support

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

At a July 20 briefing, U.S. State Department Spokesperson Ned Price pledged full support for Ambassador Kelly Degnan, echoing her rhetoric. According to him, the misinformation and personal attack on Kelly Degnan and her team are not appropriate.

"Disinformation and personal attacks on Ambassador Degnan or her team are not consistent with how partners communicate with one another, and we will continue to focus on supporting our shared goals."

Ned Price opened his daily briefing on July 20 by talking about Georgia and said that the Embassy in Tbilisi is doing everything to support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the Georgian population. Referencing Georgia's recently granted European perspective, Price said while the U.S. fully supports Georgian citizens' EU aspirations, the rhetoric from some Georgian officials recently, however, seems intended to distract Georgia's citizens from that goal. Price also noted that the US will continue to help Georgia and support it in carrying out the reforms needed to obtain the status of a candidate for the EU.

"Ambassador Degnan and her team at our embassy in Tbilisi are committed to working with the people of Georgia in support of their Euro-Atlantic aspirations. We have worked shoulder to shoulder for 30 years on democratic reforms, economic development, and security cooperation. This remains unchanged," he added.

Price once again confirmed support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, reiterating that the U.S. is working with allies and partners to bring an end to President Putin's war in Ukraine as quickly as possible and to secure a peaceful future for the entire region. Kelly Degnan, the US ambassador to Georgia, recently became the object of criticism by the representatives of the Georgian government. They accuse the ambassador of interfering in Georgia's domestic affairs.

Ruling Georgian Dream party officials have recently lashed out on several issues, including the U.S.' critical position



on Judge Lasha Chkhikvadze's decision to imprison opposition Mtavari Arkhi TV chief Nika Gvaramia.

In a letter, where the Judge accused MEP and the U.S. of pressuring the judiciary, he wrote that he has 'personal experience of such pressure', referring to his removal from a planned study trip to the U.S. Chkhikvadze said he had met with the U.S. Department of Justice representative Kevin Burke before the planned trip, who 'asked me about the factual circumstances of the case and told me that the Ambassador is interested in why I decided on a guilty verdict, and especially why I used imprisonment as the punishment.' Chkhikvadze added that soon after the meeting, 'my participation was no longer desirable and I was removed from the list'.

Ambassador Degnan, denied Judge Chkhikvadze's allegation of interference in the judicial system, saying that "any suggestion that the United States was interfering in the judicial process here is, is simply not true."

Members of the ruling party and the

opposition responded to Spokesperson Price's statement. Below is a sampling of their reactions. MP Archil Talakvadze said that no representative of the Georgian government has attacked or insulted the representatives of the United States of America... "I understand that the radical opposition, our opponents, want to blame what they are doing, attacking and insulting Western ambassadors, on the Georgian Dream," he added. MP Mikheil Sarjveladze stated that Price must be not well informed and clarified that Judge Chkhikvadze's statement arose questions in society, as well as among politicians. He recalled his comment from the previous day when he emphasized the need to clarify this situation, adding that he doesn't have the feeling that in this case, there are extreme misfortunes or legal violations.

The opposition also responded to this situation. MP Vakhtang Megrelishvili from Girchi said that "it was completely unheard of for our partners as well, why the Georgian government behaves the way it does, why they verbally attack our partners, while they are our only protec-

tion in the face of the risks under which we live today."

European Georgia representative Gigi Tsereteli couldn't recall such a harsh statement, which is sometimes made not towards strategic partners but unfriendly and hostile nations. "This often happens with Russia, Belarus, etc. If the government of Georgia wants to be included in this list, then it should make such statements. This is very bad for bilateral relations."

United National Movement member Bacho Dolidze thinks this is a confirmation from State Department that 'we have people in power who are interfering with Georgia's European integration, and that this government is a barrier between us and Europe, between us and the civilized world.' Ana Buchukuri from For Georgia accused the ruling party of lacking basic diplomacy skills, which the state department had to explain and remind them, "means that when you attack the Ambassador or official of the United States of America or any country, yes, it means an attack against that particular state, which this or that Ambassador represents."

## Kobakhidze Says Ukraine Wants Georgia as Second Front

By MESSENGER STAFF

Irakli Kobakhidze, the chairman of Georgian Dream, answered to Andrii Kasianov, the Chargé d'Affaires of Ukraine in Georgia, on the explicit desire of the Ukrainian authorities for Georgia to become the second front.

Irakli Kobakhidze contends that society should decide whether or not the Ukrainian government's attitude is appropriate.

"Once again, what we have been saying for so long has been confirmed. The Ukrainian authorities have an open desire for Georgia to become the second



front, which Kasianov unfortunately once again repeated. The society should judge all this, how correct this attitude is on the part of the Ukrainian authorities," said Irakli Kobakhidze.

For information, the Chargé d'Affaires of Ukraine told journalists that Georgia ought to help Ukraine far more.

"Today, when Russia is waging a war on the peaceful land of Ukraine, we had expectations that Georgia would provide more effective assistance to Ukraine, unfortunately, this is not happening," said Kasianov.

EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 2.8203 | EURO - 2.8697 | GBP - 3.3748 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 5.0985 | SWISS FRANC - 2.9027 |

# NGOs Identify Alleged Cases of Vote Bribery by Ruling Party



► The study revealed a large-scale scheme of mobilizing votes in favor of the ruling Georgian Dream party through illegal means.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

Georgian NGOs ISFED and Transparency International have published a survey, according to which, a large-scale scheme of mobilizing votes in favor of the ruling party in illegal ways was identified, which is 'highly likely to prove' the use of state agencies (including law enforcement agencies) for election/party purposes. The survey was prepared based on the documents provided by Soso Gogashvili, the former deputy head of the Security Service.

As the non-governmental organizations note, personal information about employees of budgetary organizations and other citizens was allegedly collected

through these agencies, supposedly in order to put pressure on them in the future. It is also stressed in the survey that in exchange for support in the elections, citizens were provided with pre-requested benefits through various state agencies.

Based on the scale of the complete scheme, the NGOs assume that as a result of interfering in the election process with these methods, it was possible to mobilize votes in favor of the ruling party on a large scale.

"More specifically, the representatives of the ruling party, using the services of various state agencies, allegedly offered specific persons the cancellation of probation, early release from the penitentiary

institution, reinstatement of suspended/confiscated driving rights, reduction of charges (requalification) in ongoing criminal cases, improvement of the conditions of serving the sentence, postponing of military conscription, etc." the NGOs note.

Based on the information requested from the National Probation Agency, the NGOs state that during the 2018 presidential election period, the number of people who had their probation revoked and their driving privileges restored increased significantly.

Per the document, the ruling party, together with the SSG, also compiled political dossiers of employees in budgetary organizations, as well as directors of public schools and educational resource centers, and made personnel-related policy decisions on that basis.

The survey reads that the presented circumstances have been verified as far as possible and are also confirmed by the proven facts mentioned in the stories published in the media.



► The survey was prepared based on the documents provided by Ioseb Gogashvili, former deputy head of the State Security Service and one of the former high-ranking officials of the Georgian Dream party.

## Building an equal and green environment for all

### UNDP and GEF open green opportunities for people with disabilities

**BORJOMI.** 21 July 2022 – A daycare centre 'Tebe' in Borjomi serves over 30 people with disabilities, offering them space for social integration, rehabilitation and employment. Recently, the centre received a patch of fertile land from the Borjomi municipality and built a green 'Tebeland' with a greenhouse and a small nursery for growing fir trees, pines, birches and endemic spruces. The new facility helps people with disabilities to engage in environmental work and assists the municipality to nurture and restore the famous Borjomi forest.

This inclusive green initiative was implemented by 'Together for Real Change',

a civil society organization for disability rights, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme. The Borjomi City Hall and the German aid agency 'Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund' contributed to the project with some additional assistance.

To transform 'Tebeland' into a successful social enterprise, people with disabilities and 'Tebe's staff visited a greenhouse in Bakuriani to master seed and seedling care. They also learned why forests are so important for mitigating climate change and adapting to its adverse effects, and

how to protect themselves during climate-induced disasters.

Aiming to support the social integration of people with disabilities, 'Tebeland' welcomes guests from the local community. Schoolchildren and teachers from Borjomi public schools often come to visit and work together in the greenhouse.

As trees grow in the nursery, 'Tebeland' also keeps growing as an inclusive and green cooperation space for all.

"People with disabilities are routinely left out of conversations and action for a clean and healthy environment. Our community project in Borjomi proves that they can and should be part of green and

sustainable solutions. We hope that it will serve as a successful model for other municipalities," said Nino Antadze, UNDP Energy and Environment Team Leader in Georgia.

The UNDP-managed GEF Small Grants Programme has been supporting community-based environmental initiatives in Georgia for over a decade, working in partnership with local authorities and civil society organizations to protect and conserve fragile ecosystems, promote sustainable agriculture and fisheries, increase access to low-carbon energy, and catalyse sustainable urban solutions.

<b>FRIDAY</b>		<b>JULY 22</b>	
<b>Day</b>		Partly cloudy	High: <b>27°C</b>
<b>Night</b>		Partly cloudy	Low: <b>18°C</b>
<b>SATURDAY</b>		<b>JULY 23</b>	
<b>Day</b>		Sunny	High: <b>27°C</b>
<b>Night</b>		Clear	Low: <b>17°C</b>

published by **The Messenger**

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

*Founded by Prof. Zaza Gachechiladze*  
**Tamar Gachechiladze**  
*Publisher*

Phone: +995 99 56 56 21; +995 77 76 00 00  
 E-mail: [messenger@messenger.com.ge](mailto:messenger@messenger.com.ge)  
<http://www.messenger.com.ge/>

**Nino Metreveli**  
*Commercial Director*

**Mariam Mchedlidze**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

**Nino Kavelashvili**  
*Design and Layout*

The Messenger welcomes your contributions. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item please contact. All contributions should be submitted by e-mail. The Messenger Georgia's English language daily is an independent newspaper, and, therefore, the opinions expressed in some articles do not necessarily coincide with those of the newspaper. We take no responsibility for any claims made in advertisements. The Messenger preserves the style of a source written in English where possible.