

Kelly Degan Speaks About Negative Impacts of 'On Transparency of Foreign Influence' Bill

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan stated that the "On transparency of Foreign Influence" bill is Russian and aims to silence dissenting views.

According to her, the initiated bill differs from the American one, which is aimed at lobbyists and law firms that represent the interests of foreign governments.

US Ambassador Degan said that there is no problem of transparency of foreign funds and donors' finances in Georgia.

"On the example of USAID, a detailed report is submitted to the Parliament every three months, then the partners also submit a detailed report, financial or otherwise, to the tax service, and therefore, there is really no problem in terms of transparency. This information is available through various sources on various websites if anyone is interested.

This law is also inconsistent with US law. The US law targets lobbyists and law firms hired by foreign governments to represent the interests of those foreign governments. That is not what this bill is about.

This bill is a Russian law. This bill aims to silence civil society and silence dissenting views.

This law will stop Georgians from helping Georgians improve their community. This law, for example, would stop legal aid for Georgians in need. This law would stop independent living centers that work with local governments to help people with disabilities who cannot be helped by the state.

This law will stop medical research co-financed by donors and Georgian universities. This law will stop tourism agencies, business associations, farmers' associations, climate change and environmental NGOs.

And my question is - is this law needed in Georgia when there is already enough transparency and there is already deep cooperation and communication between donors and those who work for the improvement of Georgian society", said the ambassador.



Joseph Borrell Calls on Georgian Government Officials to Act Accordingly to Declared Goal of Joining EU

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joseph Borrell's press service released a statement criticizing the "on transparency of foreign influence bill", initiated by People's Power party and supported by the ruling 'Georgian Dream' party.

According to the statement, the "Acceptance of the draft law will be incompatible with the norms and values of the European Union".

"The proposed draft law on transparency of foreign influence raises serious concerns. Creating and maintaining a favorable environment for civil society organizations and ensuring media freedom are the basis of democracy.

It is also essential for the EU accession process and is part of the 12 priorities, namely priority #7 on media freedom and priority #10 on civil society engagement," the statement reads.

The statement also said that the European Union supports Georgia's efforts to implement reforms that respond to the country's aspirations for development and EU membership, as stated in the Georgian Constitution.

"We call on the political leaders of Georgia to adopt and implement reforms that are in line with the declared goal of joining the European Union, which is supported by the vast majority of Georgian citizens," said Joseph Borrell's spokesperson.



The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

President Salome Zourabichvili Delivers Speech at Exhibition Remembering Soviet Occupation of Georgia



In remembrance of the day of the Soviet occupation of Georgia, an exhibition of works of young Georgian artists was opened in Orbeliani Palace.

The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili delivered a

speech and addressed the participants and visitors of the exhibition.

"This is a very difficult day, but the most important thing is to continue fighting, we must fight the occupation and all forms of enslavement in every possible way, and not with any

war, any weapons. The most powerful weapon here is freedom. Our greatest power is freedom, free-thinking, and a free brain. With this, we defeat all forms of Putinism, because this is what humans were born for, what they live for.

That is why I am very happy that today we opened this door for all those people who think freely, fight freely, and think freely. This free Georgia is the Georgia that no one can ever defeat. Long live this Georgia, today, February 25!" said Zourabichvili.

Thea Tsulukiani Speaks on Saakashvili, Says She Believes He Will Stop 'Self-Harm'

The Minister of Culture and Sports Thea Tsulukiani told reporters that the family, mother, and the United National Movement party are using all their efforts to 'advocate' that Mikheil Saakashvili is not serving his sentence where he should be serving it.

According to Tsulukiani, she believes that lobbying activities cannot prevent this process of execution.

"We all know whether it's Saakashvili's family, in this case, mother, the party, or what's left of this party, they use all their efforts to spend a lot of money on the lobbying process,

that is, on the advocacy process, as if Saakashvili is not serving the sentence where he should be serving. We see that, based on the law, he is serving his sen-



tence in quite comfortable conditions. To put it mildly, for a number of the most serious crimes.

Perhaps they will continue to spend these funds in the future, maybe they will somehow achieve the release of this per-

son, who would be an ordinary criminal if he had not committed these crimes from the position of president. Accordingly, I am in favor of the execution of

the sentence.

I believe that he will stop self-harming, get used to the punishment, be healthy and well, and no lobbying activity can prevent this punishment process," said Tsulukiani.

Statement of the United Nations in Georgia on the draft Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence



UNITED NATIONS GEORGIA

The United Nations in Georgia expresses profound concern that adoption of the draft Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence would risk impeding the work of civil society and media and the essential contributions they make to Georgian democracy.

Civil society organizations in Georgia have been at the forefront of delivering essential services to the most vulnerable persons and helping to protect their human rights. Stigmatizing their work risks leaving persons with disabilities, internally displaced, minorities, older persons, women, youth and children, survivors of domestic violence and other people in need without effective assistance and support.

The draft law poses risks to full respect of freedoms of association and expression, the right to participate in public affairs, the right to privacy and prohibition of discrimination. Noting Georgia's current membership of the UN Human Rights Council, we encourage the Parliament of Georgia to seek legal opinions of competent regional and international bodies, to consider opinions of these bodies on similar legislation, and to conduct broad, inclusive and meaningful consultations with a wide range of stakeholders that could potentially be affected by the adoption of this draft law.

If adopted, such a law is likely to impede the work of the UN to implement the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the country strategy that we have co-signed with the Government of Georgia. The UN has been a trusted partner of Georgia for over three decades, supporting the country's develop-

ment in line with Georgia's own national priorities and assisting the people of Georgia together with all our local partners, in-

cluding civil society and media.

We urge the Georgian authorities to take all the necessary steps to avoid measures that

risk having a chilling effect on Georgian democracy and on the vibrancy and quality of development support to Georgia.

Weather

Monday, February 27

Day ☀ Clear High: 17°C

Night 🌙 Clear Low: 3°C

Tuesday, February 28

Day ☁ Partly Cloudy High: 18°C

Night ☁ Mostly Cloudy Low: 5°C

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Invites 16-20 year old young speakers to take part in the
Public Speaking Competition

The theme of the competition is "Relations between nations are too important to be left to governments alone". Speakers may interpret this theme in any way they see fit, but they should not use the theme as their title. Each speaker will be allocated 5 minutes. The competition will be held in three rounds. The first round March 8, 11, 13 at the English Language Centre "British Corner". The date and theme of the second round will be announced later.

The competition is sponsored by the Bank of Georgia.

ESU-Georgia will send the lucky winner to London to take part in the final and organize 5 day stay in England. The deadline for registration is March 6

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