

Rati Bregadze and Maria Peichinovich-Burich Discuss Deepening Cooperation between Ministry of Justice and Council of Europe

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

At the meeting, the Minister of Justice of Georgia, Rati Bregadze, and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Maria Peichinovich-Burich, discussed the deepening of cooperation between the Ministry of Justice and the Council of Europe.

According to the Ministry of Justice, the meeting acknowledged Georgia's progress in the protection of human rights and the strengthening of the rule of law, as reflected in the conclusions and reports of the Council of Europe bodies.

"The discussion touched upon successful reforms carried out in the penitentiary system. These reforms have eliminated the practice of torture and inhumane treatment in prisons, which had been repeatedly criticized by the Strasbourg Court and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) of the Council of Europe until 2012.

Prisoners now have access to higher education and opportunities to acquire demanding professions. They receive comprehensive medical services, par-



ticipate in sports competitions, can utilize the services of the House of Justice within penitentiary institutions, and secure employment and income.

The legislative changes implemented in 2022 received positive evaluations. These changes enable Georgian courts to actively apply precedents set by the

Strasbourg Court, thus bringing the Georgian justice system closer to the established standards of human rights protection by the European Court.

Attention was also focused on the importance of enforcing interstate disputes won by Georgia against Russia, and the Secretary-General of the Council of

Europe pledged full support to Georgia throughout this process," the statement reads.

The information emphasized that the Ministry of Justice will maintain its close collaboration with European institutions in order to further enhance human rights and reinforce the rule of law.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan Raises Concerns Over Direct Flights to Georgia as Potential Gateway for Russians to Europe



According to Kelly Degnan, the US Ambassador to Georgia, the resumption of direct flights to Russia raises concerns since it not only facilitates more Russians visiting Georgia but also enables them to use Georgia as a gateway to further reach into Europe and the US.

Kelly Degnan has highlighted that virtually every action taken has been directed towards exerting pressure on Russia in order to halt its aggressive warfare.

"The direct flights are a cause for concern because they allow not only more Russians to come to Georgia, but also to use Georgia as a gateway to further travel to Europe. Europe has decided to close its doors to them as part of the pressure on Russia, utilizing it as one of the mechanisms to end this war. In this scenario, the flights will facilitate the departure of the Russian population to Europe. In fact, all the measures taken are aimed at pressuring Russia to cease the war of aggression, which is precisely what the sanctions and agreed border controls seek to achieve. That is why the resumption of flights is so worrisome," stated Kelly Degnan.

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Ukraine Imposes Sanctions on Georgian Airways and Founder Tamaz Gaiashvili

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

It was revealed on July 1st, that President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky issued a decree imposing 10-year sanctions on the Georgian airline, Georgian Airways, and also applying a personal sanction to the founder of the airline, Tamaz Gaiashvili.

On social media, Davit Arakhamia, the leader of the 'Servant of the People' faction in the Ukrainian Rada, expressed gratitude to the President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili and the President's office for their role in sanctioning the airline 'Georgian Airways' and its owner Tamaz Gaiashvili.

Arakhamia stated that the government of Georgia consistently fails to comprehend the right advice provided by the president.

"President Zourabichvili announced a boycott of the resumption of flights with the Russian Federation. Unfortunately, the

government of Georgia never understands the president's right advice. We have heard, and today witnessed, the sanctioning of the airline company 'Georgian Airways' and its owner. Thanks to Mrs. Salome and the office of the President. Thanks to the Security Council of Ukraine for the timely response," said Arakhamia.

Tamaz Gaiashvili, the founder of Georgian Airways, deemed the sanctions imposed by Ukraine on his company and himself as 'absurd' and 'unfair'.

Gaiashvili expressed that while he wasn't taken aback by the President of Ukraine's decision regarding the sanctions, he was surprised by the "applause of opposition groups."

Gaiashvili stated that it is widely recognized that airlines worldwide lack the authority to grant permission for flight operations in different countries. Such decisions are governed by government agreements on air traffic between the respective

nations. He emphasized that his company, like all others, must adhere to the decisions made by the Government of Georgia.

"It is well known that none of the world's airlines have the competence to issue permission to start or stop flights in one or another country. All this is regulated by the government agreement on air traffic between the two countries. We, like all other companies, are obliged to comply with the decisions made by the Government of Georgia," Gaiashvili said.



The News in Brief

President Salome Zourabichvili: Russia's Recent Actions Highlight EU's Recognition of Manipulation Towards Georgia



The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili expressed her profound disappointment regarding the failure to obtain EU candidacy status. However, she also acknowledged that it served as a warning and understood the underlying reasons for the decision.

According to the president, "the European Union has come to the realization that Russia is toying with Georgia, thanks to the recent actions taken by Russia in relation to the country."

"Now that there is an awareness that Russia is playing a game since the war with Ukraine started, this whole period is wrong in every aspect. All of its steps are wrong. In this case, what started with us—the flights, the visa-free regime, all the steps—made the European Union realize that Russia is playing with Georgia."

Maybe our government didn't understand, but the European Union understood well. Here is a 'soft power' game with Georgia, and they don't want to give such a victory in their hands at a time when Ukraine is winning on its front. Therefore, I think there is a real chance, but we also have to give something in our hands.

It depends on the government and not only. There are people, civil society—the president, political parties—we all have something to say in order to convince the European Union to the end that this will be the right decision.

We know very well that these recommendations or conditions will not go anywhere. This is actually what we need to get this country out of the Soviet mentality and structures once and for all. They tell us that we have to do it, but we have to do it for ourselves, we need it," Zourabichvili said.

Georgia Struggles to Meet EU Recommendations, Posing Challenges for Membership Candidacy

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

As it turns out, the European Union considers only three of Georgia's 12 executable recommendations to be fully implemented. This will remove the grounds for the Georgian government's assertion that it has fully implemented 11 recommendations and only one remains - depolarization. Nevertheless, they still consider it possible for Georgia to receive the status of a candidate for EU membership, but with the imposition of additional conditions.

On June 21, the European Commission presented a report to EU ambassadors in Brussels stating that Georgia has fully implemented three of the 12 priorities related to gender equality, decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and the appointment of a public defender. Georgia's 7 priorities related to political depolarization, judicial reform, institutional independence and control, fight against corruption, fight against organized crime, protection of human rights and involvement of civil society in the decision-making process were considered partially fulfilled. "Limited progress" has been achieved in terms of de-oligarchization, and as for media pluralism, according to the report, Georgia has not made progress in this regard.

It was also noted that among the members of the "Association Trio", Ukraine and Moldova significantly surpassed Georgia in the process of getting closer to the

European Union. However, if we look at the implementation of EU recommendations, this advantage does not seem to be much.

For example, Moldova has fully implemented three of the 9 priorities related to democratic reforms, dialogue with civil society and protection of human rights. Partial progress has been made in the issue of judicial reform, Moldova is expected to intensify the fight against corruption, improve the quality of investigations, improve the efficiency of proceedings related to de-oligarchization and focus on the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

As for war-torn Ukraine, it has so far fully implemented two of the 7 recommendations, which relate to judicial reform and media legislation. As for the remaining five recommendations, there are important measures to be taken, including strengthening the anti-money laundering system and reforming the law enforcement system.

Ukraine should also implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission regarding legislation on de-oligarchization and national minorities, as well as the initiation of a selection procedure for the Constitutional Court.

As we can see, Ukraine and Moldova do not seem to have a great advantage over Georgia in terms of the implementation of specific recommendations. These two countries differ from Georgia in that the rulers of these two countries, firstly, do not make anti-Western statements and sec-

ondly, they do not cooperate with Russia. Of course, this does not refer to Ukraine, which is at war with Russia, but to Moldova. Obviously, the restoration of direct flights between Russia and Georgia, and the sharp increase in economic cooperation, has a bad impression on the West, which raises doubts that the Georgian authorities are helping Russia to overcome economic sanctions.

It is likely that Georgian Dream will not give up either anti-Western rhetoric or cooperation with Russia. Probably, according to their calculations, even if Russia is defeated in Ukraine, it will not be weakened enough to leave the Caucasus.

The pro-Western opposition is pinning its hopes on the 2024 parliamentary elections. In these elections, the opposition assumes that they should defeat the "Georgian Dream", after which it will not be a problem to fully implement any of the recommendations of the European Union. Recently, the results of the public opinion survey conducted by Edison Research on the order of "Formula" TV station were published. If parliamentary elections were held tomorrow, "Georgian Dream" would have 37% support, and "National Movement" would have 25% support.

It should be noted that the research was conducted before Mikheil Saakashvili announced his active involvement in Georgian politics. Giorgi Gakharia's party "For Georgia" takes the third place in the survey with 6%, and the "Labor Party" is in the 4th place

with 5%. The rating of the rest of the parties, some of which are talking about the creation of the 3rd political center, is below the 5% threshold. These are pro-Western political forces Lelo (4%), Girchi (Zurab Japaridze) -4%, Ana Dolidze's "For the People" (3%), Strategy Agmashenebeli - 3%, Girchi (Iago Khvichia) - 3%.

Then there are four parties with 2% - "Droa", "Alt Info", "Mokalakie" and "People's Power", as well as two parties "European Georgia" and "Alliance of Patriots" with 1%. As we can see, on the whole, under the conditions of proportional elections, the opposition should gain an advantage over "Georgian Dream", but the opposition is fragmented and unable to unite, and some parties do not even intend to, despite the existing 5% threshold. There are several 1-2% parties in the opposition, which support anti-Western policies, and their votes will go to the "Georgian Dream" piggy bank, most importantly, "Georgian Dream" has a powerful administrative resource in its hands. So the pro-Western opposition needs serious efforts.

However, in parallel with the political process, a strong social protest is breaking out, some of the miners from Chiatura moved to Tbilisi, some of the participants of the rally, in addition to the hunger strike, cut out their mouths and eyes, which further intensifies the protest. The wave of social protest, if the government does not react to it effectively, may take on an even larger form.

German Embassy and KfW together with the Georgian government handed over waste collection vehicles and equipment to Kakheti region



Germany is actively supporting Georgia in modernizing its public infrastructure to enhance the living conditions of its population, protect the environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. On 28 June, Mzia Giorgobiani, Deputy

Minister of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, Lidija Christmann, Head of Development Cooperation at the German Embassy and Birgit Holderied-Kress, KfW Regional Director South Caucasus, handed over 23 waste collection



and 10 pick-up trucks to Kakheti Region. The Governor of Kakheti Region – Mr. Giorgi Aladashvili and all mayors of relevant municipalities were present at the event. Waste collection is an initial step towards improving waste management. However, further com-

ponents of integrated solid waste management, in particular waste transfer and proper disposal on a sanitary landfill, still need to be established to ensure that Kakheti maintains its beauty.

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Weather

Monday, July 3

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 31°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 20°C

Tuesday, July 4

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 32°C

Night 🌧️ Partly Cloudy
Low: 20°C

published by

The Messenger

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On the occasion of Celebration the 247th Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America, the Ambassador of the United States of America H.E. Kelly C. Degnan held a reception on June 29.









