

## US Ambassador Kelly Degnan Addresses Attempts to Weaken Partnership, Reaffirms Support for Georgia, and Responds to Government's Criticism



Georgian Service (RFE/RL)

By Liza Mchedlidze

US Ambassador to Georgia, Kelly Degnan, has addressed concerns about attempts to weaken the robust partnership between the United States and Georgia. In an interview with Radio Liberty, she stated, "There are people who are trying to undermine the close, strong partnership between the US and Georgia."

Degnan emphasized the en-

during nature of the relationship, asserting that the USA remains committed to supporting Georgia. She noted, "The USA is not going anywhere and will stand by Georgia as long as the people of Georgia aspire to a democratic future."

"There are individuals who are attempting to undermine the close and robust partnership between the US and Georgia. Their motives seem to revolve around personal interests, and

this seems to be their intended objective. Their efforts extend beyond discrediting the USA; they also target any independent voice that advocates for Georgia's European and democratic prospects.

I believe that the people of Georgia are discerning – at least the ones I've encountered possess a keen awareness. They are accustomed to such forms of Russian and pro-Russian disinformation, and they possess the ability to

discern when attempts are being made to harm Georgia's alliances with its closest allies and true strategic partners. These partners, including the US, have been steadfast in their support for Georgia over the course of more than three decades and are here to stay. We will stand by Georgia until the people of Georgia aspire to a democratic future," Degnan stated.

Degnan also addressed criticisms from members of the rul-

ing party. The ambassador emphasized that she does not take such criticism personally, highlighting that what holds significance is the perspective of the Georgian people. She also conveyed that Georgians have demonstrated on numerous occasions their preference for Europe.

The US Ambassador explained the areas in which the United States is assisting Georgia: "It's quite simple: we help Georgia better protect its borders, safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity, stimulate its economy, and generate better employment opportunities so that people can remain in their towns and villages, enjoy a good quality of life, and raise their families where they desire, without being compelled to go abroad or relocate to Tbilisi.

We support Georgia in constructing robust, stable, and democratic institutions because Georgians aspire to live in a European democracy. This aspiration is crystal clear. And as it aligns with the goals of the people of Georgia, we stand here to provide our support. Our endeavors in this country are evident. Everywhere you look in this nation, you'll find proof that over the past 30 years, the US, in partnership with both the Georgian government and its people, has been steadfastly pursuing these objectives in Georgia. I'm confident that this productive collaboration will continue in the years to come," stated Kelly Degnan.

### Irakli Zarkua Accuses Kelly Degnan of 'Increasing Polarization' and Creating 'Revolutionary Waves' in Georgia



By Liza Mchedlidze

Kelly Degnan spoke about the electronic election system in an interview with RFE/RL. She mentioned that the US Embassy will support a voter education campaign designed to help people not only understand the significance of their vote but also to inform voters about how the system functions.

As per her remarks, it has been observed in the US that the electronic system does not ensure absolute cleanliness and fairness. Degnan stated that manipulation is possible if individuals are not properly trained in using the system and if voters lack an understanding of its operations.

In response to Degnan's statement, Irakli Zarkua, a member of the Georgian Dream majority, stated that they had formulated the plan for electronic elections

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6192; Euro - 2.8547; GBP - 3.3356; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.7788; Swiss Franc - 2.9770

## Irakli Zarkua Accuses Kelly Degnan of 'Increasing Polarization' and Creating 'Revolutionary Waves' in Georgia

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based on US recommendations. However, due to Degnan's current questioning of this plan, he accused her of various actions or intentions. Among these are "increasing" polarization in the country and an "attempted revolutionary wave".

"It appears that our primary partner, who should be supportive of democratic processes, national development, and peace – Mrs. Degnan, a representative figure – is questioning the upcoming electronic elections that we planned based on their recommendation, and what's more, we are currently implementing

them in practice...

And if you continue to question these matters in 2024, you are destructive, Ms. Ambassador, a former one. I would like to directly address this to you and convey that you seem to have not fully understood your mission. It appears that you have not considered the fact that you are not merely a representative of a political party, but rather a representative of the state – the very state on which we have rested our hopes, both now and for the foreseeable future. We anticipate further advancement in European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and this remains our shared aspiration," Zarkua stated.

Zarkua accused Degnan of not having taken any steps towards Georgia's Euroatlantic integration during her tenure as US Ambassador. He pointed out that Georgia lacks free trade with the USA, and he claimed that she has not contributed to its realization. Similarly, he criticized the absence of visa-free travel between Georgia and the USA, stating that she has not made any efforts to achieve it. Moreover, he asserted that there has been no discernible investment in these areas from her side.

According to him, the Georgian Dream has successfully 'suppressed' attempted revolu-

tionary waves 'three or four times'.

"Perhaps you were one of the creators of the revolutionary wave here, and three or four times we suppressed it. This is because the interests of Georgia and the majority of the population never encompassed chaos and disorder, nor the opening of a second front, which these individuals are attempting. I apologize, but you have made numerous mistakes and have unfortunately placed yourself in that position. I had aimed to bid you farewell with kind words, but, regrettably, things have unfolded this way. Therefore, goodbye, my darling," said Zarkua.

### Opinion & Analysis

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

The Russian-Ukrainian war has had a significant impact on the ongoing events in the Caucasus, and as time passes, this impact will become even more significant, both directly in the North Caucasus, which is part of Russia today, and in the countries of the South Caucasus as well.

By attacking Ukraine, Putin got not the quick victory he was hoping for, but a protracted war in which he has no prospect of victory, although Ukraine does not yet have the support to be able to win a quick victory over the Russian army.

According to a number of experts, if Ukraine manages to reach the coast of the Sea of Azov this year, it will be a significant success. In this case, Russia will no longer be able to communicate with Crimea by land, and if the attacks on the Kerch Bridge intensify, it will put the Russian army remaining in Crimea and the surrounding region in a very difficult situation.

The protracted war is a serious test for Ukraine, whose resources are significantly inferior to Russia's, and for the West, whose unity in supporting Ukraine influences the fate of the war. The protracted war is a test for Russia as well.

This is a war where there is no prospect of his victory and which requires a serious strain on his resources. There has been talk for a long time that the war could exacerbate Russia's internal problems and call into question the stability of the Putin

# The Far-reaching Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on the Caucasus

regime. Prigozhin's rebellion can be considered the first visible sign of this.

The war in Ukraine had its echoes in the North Caucasus. In the search for human resources for the war, the Kremlin places special emphasis on the regions, and the number of conscripts from the national republics of the North Caucasus is large, so the casualties are also enormous.

A few months ago in Dagestan, there were protests by the mothers of those mobilized. The participation of the Chechen ruler Kadyrov's military units in the war against Ukraine should be mentioned separately. However, this is not the only concern for the republics of the North Caucasus.

These republics are subsidized and receive 60-80 percent of their budgets from Moscow. Without these funds, serious social problems will arise in these republics. In addition, if Moscow is no longer able to control the situation, frozen ethno-conflicts and territorial disputes may reappear in the North Caucasus.

First of all, it concerns the "Prygorodny" conflict between Ossetia-Alania and Ingushetia. Moscow supported the Ossetians in the 1990s and the conflict ended with their victory. Without Moscow's support, it will be difficult for them to maintain their "victory".

The Russia-Ukraine war has already caused serious changes in the South Caucasus. Before the war in Ukraine, it seems that Putin tried to win Turkey's heart, which had a painful effect on Armenia's position.

Azerbaijan was able to defeat

Armenia in the war for Nagorno-Karabakh, and today the Armenians control only a part of Nagorno-Karabakh, where the Armenian population is blockaded. Russian peacekeepers cannot provide much security for them, and in case of the withdrawal of the peacekeepers, the small Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh will have to leave this area.

Armenia is facing serious security problems. Russia officially remains a strategic partner, but no longer hopes for its support. However, in Azerbaijan, they talked about Zangezuri (the "leg" of Armenia connecting Iran) as the land of Azerbaijan. Armenia is trying to get weapons from India, Greece, Cyprus, and developing relations with France, but this cannot guarantee security. The support of Iran may become decisive for him, whose interests are not in the further strengthening of Azerbaijan-Turkey in the region.

Azerbaijan took maximum advantage of the created situation. The case of the return of Nagorno-Karabakh is being brought to an end, it is likely to help Russia circumvent sanctions and provide material assistance to Ukraine while remaining an important energy partner for the West.

After the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, the government of Georgia found itself in the strangest situation. The war made it impossible to conduct Russian and pro-Western politics simultaneously. At the same time, the pro-Russian vector of its policy, which is aimed at ever-closer cooperation with Russia,

has become evident.

They call their policy the policy of "not irritating Russia" and accuse the West of wanting to drag Georgia into a war against Russia. They claim that with such a policy they will maintain peace and "peacefully" be able to restore the country's territorial integrity. However, Russia is increasingly expanding the scope of occupation in the Tskhinvali region. It is assumed that by pursuing a "smart policy" towards Russia (Gharibashvili's words), the narrative about restoring the country's territorial integrity will be used by the Georgian Dream during the 2024 parliamentary elections. Just like how during the 2020 elections, they used the narrative "Gareji is Georgia", which they intended to return to Georgia through maps allegedly brought from Russia. It soon became clear to everyone

that it was just an election trick.

At the same time, the Georgian Dream is trying to get the candidate status for EU membership, because the Western course, despite the powerful anti-Western campaign, is supported by a large part of the population of Georgia. Their true stance regarding this was also revealed - the supposed striving for the candidate status without the actual fulfillment of the requirements of the European Union, because the fulfillment of these requirements will make it impossible to maintain the authoritarian rule in Georgia.

The current government of Georgia was betting on Russia's victory in the Russia-Ukraine war. Even today, they probably believe that even in the case of Putin's defeat in Ukraine, Russia will not be weakened enough for it to be forced to "leave the Caucasus".

### The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

#### Sopo Japaridze Announces Election Campaign on Behalf of Mikheil Saakashvili

Sopo Japaridze, a member of the United National Movement, has announced her plan to commence an election campaign on behalf of Mikheil Saakashvili, starting on August 22.

According to Japaridze, Mikheil Saakashvili is prepared to listen to the opinions of the electorate in every cor-



ner of the country.

"Starting tomorrow, I will embark on an extensive campaign, traversing every corner of

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### Weather

Tuesday, August 22

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 34°C

Night Clear  
Low: 21°C

Wednesday, August 23

Day Clear  
High: 36°C

Night Clear  
Low: 22°C

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The "Night Serenades" festival will be opened with an open air gala concert on August 22 in Borjomi. The participants of opening evening are internationally renowned musicians: Sabine Grofmeier - clarinet, Germany, Eilika Wunsch - soprano, Germany, Riccardo Marinello - tenor, Italy, Giorgi Oniani - tenor, Georgia, as well as Ensemble "Borjomi" (leader Giorgi Bugianishvili), Giorgi Oikashvili - clarinet, Georgia and Mariam Kikaleishvili - mezzo-soprano, Georgia. The soloists will be accompanied by the festival base orchestra "Georgian Virtuosi", concertmaster - Lela Mtchedlidze.

At the gala concert musicians will perform arias from the operas of Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Neapolitan songs, masterpieces of instrumental music, included: Johannes Brahms's Hungarian Dance N5, Waltz N2 of Dmitri Schostakovich and etc. Georgian classical music will also be played - "Ase Chonguri" and "Kuchkhibediner" from Otar Taktakishvili's vocal cycle "Megrelian songs".

The 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary ceremony and gala concert of the International Festival "Night Serenades" will start at 7 pm at Borjomi Likani Hotel.

"Night Serenades" will move to Batumi - on August 24, 25, at the Grand

Hall of Ilia Chavchavadze Professional State Drama Theater. On August 24, the theater stage will be graced by Eilika Wunsch - soprano, Germany and Riccardo Marinello - tenor, Italy. Famous opera arias, duets, Neapolitan songs will be performed, and Korean violinist Hyeon Park - international competitions laureate - will perform Cesar Frank's violin sonata with Georgian pianist Tamar Licheli.

On August 25, Hayon Park will perform Beethoven's violin concerto with festival base orchestra "Georgian Virtuosi", as well as "The Lark Ascending" by Ralph Vaughan Williams, with Tamar Licheli. Tamar Licheli will also perform Liszt/Gounod's Waltz.

The following three concerts will be held in September, at Tbilisi State Conservatoire Grand Hall.

Along with the concert program, within the framework of the festival, special attention will be paid to the cognitive-educational program for students and young people, including the disabled, which includes master classes, workshops and open lectures.

XV International Festival "Night Serenades" will be held from August 22 to September 24. The founder of the festival

is the world-famous violinist and conductor Liana Issakadze, the artistic director - German-based musician and teacher, Giorgi Issakadze.

This year "Night Serenades" will be presented with 6 concerts in three cities of Georgia: Borjomi, Batumi and Tbilisi.

"Night Serenades" is an international festival with the longest history in Georgia, which has been existing for 41 years. The idea of creating the mentioned festival belongs to the world-famous Georgian violinist and conductor, People's Artist of Georgia - Liana Issakadze, who is one of the greatest musicians of the century. She was included in the Encyclopedia of 2000 Prominent Musicians of the 20th Century by the Cambridge Bibliographic Center (England, 2002).

In 1982, Liana Issakadze founded the international festival "Night Serenades" in the most beautiful part of Georgia, Abkhazia, which took place in Bichvinta in summers and was very popular. Unfortunately, due to the tragic events in our country, the festival ceased to exist in 1991, and it was possible to restore it only 18 years later, in 2009, in the beautiful Black Sea city - Batumi.

Over the prolific history of the festival many legendary musicians have partici-

pated in it such as Alfred Schnittke, Kurt Mazur, Gidon Kremer and many others.

Supporters: Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth of Georgia, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Adjara, Batumi City Hall, Tbilisi City Hall, Borjomi City Hall, Embassy of Italy, Embassy of Germany.

Hosts: Hotel Borjomi Likani, Hilton garden Inn Tbilisi.

Partners: Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra, Ilia Chavchavadze Professional State Drama Theater, furniture house "Nita" - best guarantee of quality and design, perfumery store chain "Lutecia", Yves Rocher, the founder of herbal cosmetics from France, Company "Sarajishvili", Brothers Khutsishvili Wine Cellar, HOTSAL.GE, "PSP" pharmacy.

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## AUGUST 22, BORJOMI

### Hotel BORJOMI LIKANI

THE BEGINNING 19:00

XV საერთაშორისო ფესტივალი  
 XV INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL



SABINE GROFMEIER



EILIKA WUNSCH



RICCARDO MARINELLO



GIORGI ONIANI



ENSEMBLE "BORJOMI"



GIORGI OIKASHVILI



MARIAM KIKALEISHVILI

Festival Base Orchestra "GEORGIAN VIRTUOSI"

Ensemble "BORJOMI", director Giorgi Bugianishvili

ფესტივალის დამფუძნებელი  
ლიანა ისაკაძე

FOUNDER OF THE FESTIVAL  
LIANA ISSAKADZE

სამხატვრო ხელმძღვანელი  
გიორგი ისაკაძე

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
GIORGI ISSAKADZE



TKT.GE



არტ ალიანსი

## The News in Brief

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the country on behalf of Mikheil Saakashvili. I am committed to attentively listening to all of you and understanding your concerns and opinions concerning the management of these highly complex political processes. You are not just participants in this challenging endeavor, but also architects of this process. Our shared goal is to celebrate victory together, and that victory is now closer than ever before.

Mikheil Saakashvili is fully prepared to listen to each and every one of you, to understand your opinions. His readiness is matched by his eagerness to collaboratively shape political processes that will

lead to victory in the near future. I assure you, your individual written opinions will directly reach Mikheil Saakashvili, and together, we will formulate a powerful strategy for triumph," stated Japaridze.

### Mikheil Sarjveladze Accuses Opposition of Gaining 'Political Dividends' from Shovi Tragedy

Mikheil Sarjveladze, the chairman of the human rights protection committee, addressed the opposition's initiative to create an investigative commission in parliament by stating, "None of the oppositionists who speak loudly and enthusiastically about the

investigative commission have come to the site and visited the epicenter of the tragedy."

According to him, the opposition's intention is to gain political dividends from this tragedy

rather than to uncover the truth.

"When discussing the opposition, which made very loud statements regarding the Shovi tragedy, their commitment was notably lacking, in fact, it was clearly felt that their desire was to write political dividends on this huge tragedy rather than seeking the truth. Among them, as demands for the creation of an investigative commission began to be raised, we witnessed many similar requests. However, it's important not to overlook the fact that none of the oppositionists who speak about it loudly and actively actually visited the location or physically inspected the epicenter of the tragedy that took place there," stated Sarjveladze.

