

Changes in UNM: Koba Nakopia Replaces Nika Melia as Political Council Chairman

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The United National Movement (UNM), the largest opposition party, has made a reshuffle of its leadership, with party chair Nika Melia stepping down from his position as the interim chair of its political council. He will be replaced with Koba Nakopia, who has been the executive secretary of the UNM since 2019. The post of the UNM's executive secretary currently remains vacant.

Nakopia stated that the changes in the party were due to a need for 'proper management.'

In a briefing on January 10, Melia announced that he remains in the post of party chairman, and will lead the UNM Tbilisi organization, replacing Zaal Udumashvili. Melia has served as the chair of the political council of the UNM since 2019. After being elected as the party leader in 2020, he continued to serve as the interim chair of the political council up until now.

UNM also reintroduced the previously abolished position of the general secretary and appointed another longtime member Petre Tsiskarishvili for the post.

Melia noted that an "active process of renewal" will continue in both Tbilisi and regional branches of the party. According to him the changes in the party are necessary due to the challenges the UNM is facing, adding that had the idea of making reforms last year, but failed due to various events such as his arrest in



Akaki Minashvili became Koba Nakopia's deputy,

February and former president Saakashvili's return to the country in October of 2021 after 8 years in political exile. He said it was necessary for the party to significantly alter its agenda and

structure to improve its organizational system and better communicate with the public.

"I want all Georgian citizens to know what we are fighting for," Melia said,

stressing the need for the party to appeal to undecided voters and to attract new members.

He also highlighted the importance for the UNM to be more vocal about the needs of ordinary citizens, which according to him, have been neglected recently.

Recall that Nakopia, a UNM member since 2008, was Senaki mayoral candidate in local self-government elections last year, where he received 47% of the vote. He has been a Member of Parliament for 4 convocations. "Transparency International - Georgia" 2016 report indicates Nakopia was among those deputies who never used their right of speech at the plenary session in 2013, 2014 and 2015. According to the property declaration filed in 2021, Nakopia owns houses in Russia and Spain besides Georgia.

According to Iago Khvichia, the leader of Girchi, he expected more from the meeting of the political council of the UNM.

"It turned out that everyone was promoted and Zaliko Udumashvili was to blame for losing the elections," Khvichia commented, stressing that his expectation was related to taking responsibility from someone.

Ruling Georgian Dream party MP Mikheil Sarjveladze says that despite the changes, the UNM will remain 'the main destructive force of Georgian politics.' He doesn't think that these changes should inspire great expectations in society.



Melia says the active process of renewal in the party will continue.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.0893; Euro - 3.5002; GBP - 4.2027; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.1236; Swiss Franc - 3.3351

NATO Consults With Its Partners Ahead of NATO-Russia Council meeting, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg Says



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg welcomes that Russia has agreed to a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council.

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

As NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has announced, ahead of the NATO-Russia council meeting, which is scheduled on January 12 in Brussels, the alliance is consulting closely with other partners, including Georgia, Moldova, Finland, Sweden, and the European Union. NATO Secretary-General welcomes that Russia has agreed to a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, assessing it as a 'positive signal'. He said the parties would focus on European security issues, transparency related to military activities, risk reduction, and arms control. According to Stoltenberg, they will listen to Russia's concerns but the alliance will address their concerns about Russia's actions as well.

On January 10, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani spoke over the phone with the NATO Deputy

Secretary-General, Mircea Geoană, regarding the ongoing European security talks between Russia and NATO allies. According to the NATO Deputy Secretary-General, the Russian Federation's proposals regarding the so-called security guarantees 'contain provisions that contradict the fundamental principles and values of NATO'. The Deputy Secretary-General reaffirmed the Alliance's unwavering support for the decision made at the Bucharest Summit that Georgia will become a member of NATO, noting that "any attempt of the third country to interfere in the foreign and security policy of the sovereign states is inadmissible."

On December 10, the Russian Foreign Ministry urged NATO to annul the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit decision which says that Georgia and Ukraine will become NATO members. According to the statement, 'to ensure the vital interests of European security,' the decision made at the Bucharest summit should be disavowed. After the Russia-US Strategic Stability Dialogue (SSD), which took place on Monday in Geneva,

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov announced that Russia needed guarantees that Ukraine and Georgia would never join NATO, stressing that they are 'fed up with loose talks and half promises'.

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Dignan released a video address yesterday where she notes that Russia does not have a veto over sovereign decisions and remarked that Russia's demands are 'unacceptable' because it attempts to "recreate the Soviet domination and control over its neighbors." According to her, the United States respects the sovereignty of each country, including Georgia and Ukraine, noting that the US would not negotiate about Georgia without

engaging Georgia in the discussions.

"We will continue to join the overwhelming majority of the international community in calling for Russia to end its occupation of Georgia," the US ambassador noted, adding that as stated in the Bucharest declaration, when the conditions are met, Georgia and other partners will become members of NATO. According to her, Russia wishes to establish an exclusive sphere of influence throughout Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and Russian President Putin's goal is to stop these countries, including Georgia, from acting as fully sovereign, independent nations that have the right to choose their security partners.

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საქართვებუნო საუბარი

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, the telephone conversation with the NATO Deputy Secretary-General is a confirmation of the constant attention paid to Georgia from its partners.

Weather

Wednesday, January 12

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 13°C
Night Cloudy
Low: 5°C

Thursday, January 13

Day Showers
High: 7°C
Night Mostly Cloudy
Low: 1°C

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