

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

NATO's James Appathurai Discusses Objectives of Visit to Georgia

James Appathurai, who serves as NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, discussed the primary objectives of his visit to Georgia. He stressed the significance of democratic nations taking more assertive measures to safeguard their security and uphold their values.

Appathurai also emphasized the importance of increased collaboration between Georgia and NATO to ensure stability, highlighting the country's strategic importance to all NATO allies. Appathurai focused on exploring opportunities for enhanced practical cooperation between NATO and Georgia across various domains.

One of the topics discussed during Appathurai's visit was cyber defense, with a particular emphasis on supporting Georgia in implementing practical mechanisms to enhance its cyber defense capabilities.

"It is a pleasure to be in Georgia, a country that has three main objectives. Firstly, the region and the Euro-Atlantic area have been significantly impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It is crucial that democratic countries maintain close cooperation and take proactive measures to protect our shared security and values. For all NATO allies, Georgia is an important country, and it is crucial that we collaborate closely to ensure stability. My visit here is in the context of this goal.

Recent studies have indicated that the Georgian people strongly uphold democratic values and aspire to Euro-Atlantic integration, which makes me feel welcome and at home here," Appathurai said.

The focus of the discussions was to identify areas where both parties could work together more effectively. They discussed practical cooperation in various fields, including energy security, as Georgia and the region have become more important to Euro-Atlantic energy security. They want to ensure that Georgia's



energy security is protected.

"At the meetings, we also discussed practical cooperation in various fields. One of the directions is energy security. As NATO member states have managed to find ways to diversify away from Russian gas and oil, Georgia and the region have become more important to Euro-Atlantic energy security. We want to make sure it is protected," Appathurai said.

Appathurai talked about the importance of increasing cooperation between Georgia and NATO in various fields such as energy security and cyber defense. He emphasized the need to protect critical infrastructure under the Black Sea and to implement practical mechanisms for cyber security. Appathurai mentioned ongoing projects that aim to increase Georgia's transit role in energy and digital directions through the Black Sea and

highlighted the role of the National Security Council in coordinating work in this direction.

"I know that there are important projects on the way that will increase Georgia's transit role in energy and digital directions through the Black Sea. We want to work together for the security of critical infrastructure under the Black Sea, which is at risk and we must do more to protect it. We also talked about increasing practical cooperation when it comes to cyber defense. I was in the National Security Council, which has the most important role in coordinating work in this direction. This topic was also discussed in the Ministry of Defense to help Georgia implement practical mechanisms to work on cyber security, which is also a part of wider cyber security," stated Appathurai.

During his visit to Georgia, James Appathurai met with representatives of government and opposition parties in parliament to discuss the need for reforms to continue. He noted that while progress has been made, high political polarization is hindering the implementation of some reforms.

Appathurai expressed disappointment that the situation has not improved in this regard despite ongoing political polarization for many years. He emphasized the importance of making progress before the NATO summit in July, as Georgia's engagement with the alliance and broader integration topics will be discussed.

Appathurai expressed his satisfaction with many of the reforms already implemented but stressed that much more needs to be done together. He also committed to bringing the country closer to NATO and looked forward to many more high-level NATO visits to Georgia.



H.E. Salome ZOURABICHVILI,

President of Georgia,

May 03, 2023

Dear Madam President,

Georgia has clearly declared its European aspirations since its independence. This European path is enshrined in the Constitution, and it is currently at its historical maximum, with the support of almost 90% of the Georgian people, who have consistently demonstrated their commitment to a European future.

On June 24, 2022, the European Council made a historic decision to grant a European perspective to Georgia, marking another critical step in our bilateral relations. Notably, the country was given 12 recommendations, the fulfilment of which is an inevitable prerequisite for EU membership candidate status. Two of the addressed recommendations are to undertake more vigorous efforts to guarantee a free, pluralistic, and independent media environment, particularly by ensuring that criminal procedures brought against media owners fulfil the highest legal standards by launching impartial, effective, and timely investigations in cases involving media professionals, and ensure a judiciary that is fully and truly independent, accountable, and impartial along the entire judicial institutional chain.

As pro-active advocates of Georgia and supporters of its democratic development, progress, and European future, we have been closely following the implementation of these recommendations, which have the power to bring the country to EU candidate status and positively transform it.

In this context, we are reiterating our condemnation of the politically motivated sentence of Mr Nika Gvaramia, the Director of the main opposition TV channel Mtavari, on May 16, 2022, and that the Tbilisi Court of Appeal upheld the decision of the Tbilisi City Court and found Mr Gvaramia guilty on November 2, 2022.

In line with the EU recommendations, we strongly believe that critical media voices should never be silenced and that they are an essential element of a vibrant democracy. Therefore, we are addressing you with a call to consider activating the power of the Presidential pardon so that Mr Gvaramia is released from prison.

MEPs Urge Georgian President to Pardon Nika Gvaramia on World Press Freedom Day

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The European Parliament members have called on the President of Georgia to pardon Nika Gvaramia on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day. The letter, distributed by MEP Marketka Gregorova, has been signed by 18 members of the European Parliament.

The Parliamentarians have stated that the people of Georgia have expressed their desire to join the European Union, which is reflected in the country's constitution.

Furthermore, they have emphasized the importance of creating a free, pluralistic, and in-

dependent media environment in Georgia as two out of the twelve recommendations for the country's European integration focus on this issue.

"Today is World Press Freedom Day. My colleagues and I in EU Parliament thus decided to call on the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili to consider a pardon for Nika Gvaramia. We stay forever friends of Georgia and hope to convey a symbolic message on this crucial day," Marketka Gregorova wrote on Twitter.

The European Parliament members emphasized that the investigation into media owners must be conducted with the utmost adherence to legal stan-

dards and impartiality. They stressed that it is crucial for the cases to be considered by an independent and unbiased court.

The MEPs also highlighted the Georgian people's clear aspiration towards European Union membership, which requires a free, diverse, and independent media environment as per two of the twelve recommendations issued to Georgia.

"In line with EU recommendations, we strongly believe that the voice of critical media should never be stifled and that it is vital to a strong democracy. Therefore, I urge you to consider using your authority and release Nika Gvaramia," the letter reads.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Chairman of Georgian Parliament Meets with EU Affairs Committee Members of German Bundestag



The Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, held a meeting with members of the European Union Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag to discuss long-standing diplomatic relations and successful cooperation between Germany and Georgia.

The meeting aimed to strengthen ties between the two countries and foster greater collaboration in the future.

“Shalva Papuashvili spoke about the progress and expectations achieved by Georgia in the implementation of EU recommendations.

Members of the Bundestag’s European Union Affairs Committee were interested in the ongoing parliamentary life in Georgia. The Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia provided them with information on legislative issues and also discussed current political processes.

The Chairman of the Parlia-

ment of Georgia asked the members of the Bundestag European Union Affairs Committee to support Georgia on its way to European integration.

The meeting was also attended by Anri Okhanashvili, the chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, and Nikoloz Samkharadze, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee,” the statement reads.

US Embassy and Georgia Jointly Decide on Georgian Defense Forces’ Participation in Defender 2023

The US Embassy’s announcement regarding the Georgian Defense Forces’ participation in Defender 2023 emphasizes that the decision was made collaboratively. The embassy’s statement highlights the focus on directing resources towards in-country, multinational exercises, as mutually agreed upon, as part of the military cooperation with Georgia in 2023.

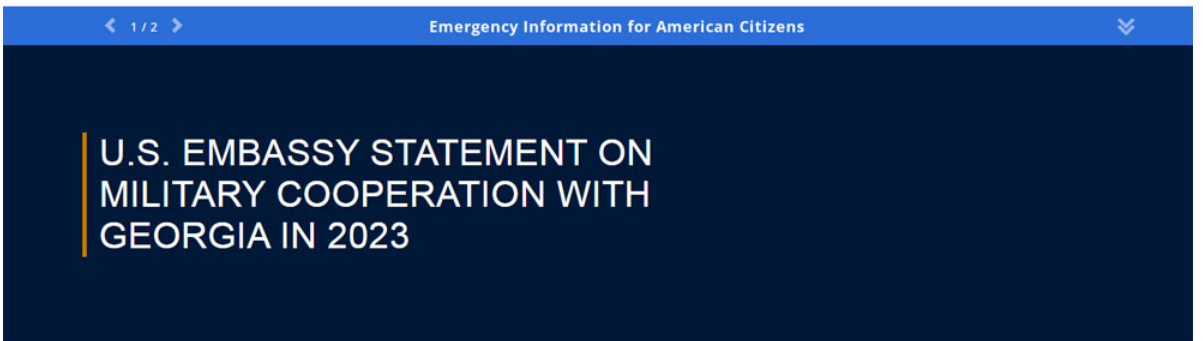
“The United States remains committed to enhancing the U.S-Georgia strategic partnership, working together to make both Georgia and America safer and more secure. In 2023 the

United States and Georgia continue to do more across a broad range of cooperative military activities. This year, the United States and Georgia are jointly focused on maximizing beneficial training opportunities to enhance Georgia’s critical capabilities. As part of that effort, we mutually decided to focus resources on in-country, multinational exercises – Agile Spirit and Noble Partner – and build on their previous success to most effectively strengthen Georgia’s interoperability and its capacity for resilience and defense,” The US Embassy’s statement reads.



U.S. EMBASSY IN GEORGIA

Country/Area Search Menu Language



World Press Freedom Day: defending press freedom is a universal mission that knows no borders, says EU

On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, the European Union condemns all forms of threats and violence against journalists, continues to support media workers in danger through local missions and via dedicated programmes, and joins UNESCO in its message: today more than ever, freedom of expression is crucial for all other human rights.

The EU reminds that the protection of freedom of expression remains a key priority for its human rights action, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 75 years ago:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

In a statement, EU High Representative Josep Borrell said: “While the preservation of free, independent and pluralistic media is vital for resilient and healthy democracies, press freedom is at stake in most parts of the world today. Journalists, media workers and all those who

bring independent quality information to the public, shed light on the gross human rights violations and atrocities and hold those in power to account increasingly face discredit, threats and attacks, including through disinformation.”

Borrell also mentioned report-

ers in Ukraine and journalists from Belarus among media workers around the world who continue to pay a high price for exercising their profession.

The statement focuses particularly on women journalists who are mostly vulnerable to threats and increasing attacks,

both offline and online, and are exposed to stigmatisation, sexist hate speech, trolling, sexual and gender-based violence and even murder. According to the EU, 73% of women journalists have experienced online threats, abuse, and harassment in the course of their work.

“Defending and promoting press freedom is a universal mission that knows no borders. The EU will remain committed to engage with governments, the media and civil society, both in international fora as well as at the local level, to take initiative and strengthen press freedom around the world,” the statement concludes.

For World Press Freedom Day, the European External Action Service has produced a video bringing together two journalists from countries impacted by war – Ukraine and Lebanon. Illia Ponomarenko from the Kyiv Independent, and Maya Gebeily from the Reuters Bureau in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan discuss what it means to be a war journalist.

(euneighbourseast.eu)



Weather

Thursday, May 4

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 21°C

Night Clear

Low: 9°C

Friday, May 5

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 23°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 11°C

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