

## US Ambassador to Georgia, Kelly Degnan, Bids Farewell as Her Term Concludes

By Liza Mchedlidze

Ambassador Kelly Degnan who took up the role of US Ambassador in 2020, commencing her duties in Tbilisi on January 29 of the same year, has penned a heartfelt farewell letter, marking the conclusion of her time in Georgia. In the letter, Ambassador Degnan conveyed her deep appreciation for the Georgian people and their rich history, while highlighting the resonance of values between Georgia and the United States.

In her farewell letter, she expressed her profound gratitude and affection for the Georgian people, acknowledging the warmth and generosity with which they welcomed her during her service.

A significant focus of the ambassador's message is the convergence of values shared between Georgia and America. Ambassador Degnan noted the commonality of principles that have shaped both nations' histories—values such as freedom, democracy, and justice.

One of the central themes of Ambassador Degnan's message is the remarkable progress that Georgia has achieved in the past three decades. According to Degnan, the country's transformation has been nothing short of impressive, reflecting the resilience and dedication of its people. This progress, she noted, aligns seamlessly with the United States' commitment to supporting its allies on their paths to growth and prosperity.

A key future trajectory for Georgia that Ambassador Degnan emphasized is European integration. She reaffirmed the unwavering support of the United States in this endeavor, assuring the Georgian people that the United States will con-



tinue to stand shoulder to shoulder with them as they navigate this journey towards greater European integration.

"To my Georgian friends and partners, Three and a half years ago, I arrived in Georgia to undertake the most significant duty of my life – representing the American people here as the US ambassador.

Georgia boasts a lengthy and rich history, situated at the crossroads of civilizations. It is a land with a unique culture rooted in traditions, renowned for its soul-stirring polyphony, intricate alphabets, and the literary contributions of Chavchavadze, Vazha-Pshavela, and Rustaveli. This nation encompasses powerful rivers, hidden emerald fields, marshes, forests, and captivating mountain peaks.

During my time here, I learned that

the people of Georgia, much like Americans, have resisted oppression to unify, safeguard, and fortify their homeland. Over centuries, Georgians have safeguarded the values of freedom, faith, and identity that define the Georgian essence. These shared values and traditions unite us: the spirit of independence, the spark of creativity, compassion, and unyielding perseverance.

The perseverance of the many Georgians I've had the privilege of meeting is a constant source of inspiration. This determination has driven Georgia's remarkable progress and transformation over the past three decades, rekindling the very principles upon which modern and historical Georgia was built: equality, justice, and democracy. These are principles that the United States is stead-

fastly committed to upholding. This shared commitment is why America stands alongside the Georgian people, supporting your journey towards enhanced stability, security, and prosperity through European integration.

"Strength lies in unity" – a motto that perfectly encapsulates the ethos of both Georgia and America.

As I reflect on my relatively brief time in Georgia, my memories create a mosaic of the faces of inspiring individuals who shared their personal stories of partnership and progress. Whether it was an exchange participant offering ideas for community improvement, a scientist sharing collaborative efforts against COVID-19, a parent advocating for essential services for children with disabilities, or a teacher imparting critical thinking skills to young minds dealing with issues like misinformation and polarization – these interactions form a kaleidoscope of positive change.

There are countless more stories waiting to be told.

By bolstering democratic institutions to counter challenges, by illuminating pathways of hope and optimism, by resolutely progressing toward Georgia's Euro-Atlantic destiny, I am in awe of the achievements of the Georgian people and the promise of their future. This future is driven by an unwavering love for your nation and a determination to secure the bright democratic future that Georgians aspire to achieve – a future you wholeheartedly deserve.

As I bid farewell to the numerous Georgians who welcomed me into their lives, my heart overflows with gratitude and immense respect. Although I depart physically, I carry with me the love and camaraderie of cherished friends from every corner of Georgia. Serving as the United States Ambassador to this exquisite country has been an honor of immeasurable value – one that I will forever hold close." Kelly Degnan's farewell letter reads.

## Chairman of Georgian Dream Party, Irakli Kobakhidze, Discusses Charles Michel's Statement on EU Expansion

By Liza Mchedlidze

Irakli Kobakhidze, chairman of the Georgian Dream party, addressed journalists regarding the statement made by Charles Michel, the President of the European Council. According to Kobakhidze, Michel's statement exhibited dual aspects—both positive and negative—and bore a general tone, necessitating further clarification regarding the specific country poised for expansion by 2030.

"This statement had both positive and negative sides. In general, it was important to specify a particular date or year. However, the statement was somewhat vague, particularly concerning the year 2030 and its relevance. There are candidate countries within the European Union, which were granted candidate status 18 or 12 years ago. When a country became a candidate nearly two decades ago and was promised membership in the European Union within 7 years, it naturally does not create the grounds for great optimism. Hopefully, in the future, it will be explicitly indicated that 2030 holds significance for all countries with candidate status or those slated to receive it in the near future," explained Kobakhidze.

He further shared that every effort will be made to secure candidate status for Georgia. He emphasized that obvious

progress has been made in implementing the 12 points.

"Our government will maintain transparency with the European Union throughout the process, ensuring that all necessary groundwork is prepared for us to be granted candidate status by December. Naturally, the decision will carry political weight. Let's observe the decision that is reached. We hold reasons for optimism since all the prerequisites for obtaining candidate status are in place," he affirmed.

In his speech at the international strategic forum held in Slovenia on August 28, Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, declared that the expansion of the European Union is no longer a distant dream—it is imminent and preparations should be made accordingly.

Irakli Kobakhidze, chairman of the Georgian Dream party, spoke to journalists about the statement of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel. According to him, Michel's statement was general and it should be clarified for which country's expansion is planned by 2030.

"This statement had positive and negative sides. In general, it was important to name a specific date, year, however, this statement was a bit general, and to



# Debate Heats Up in Georgia Over Fairness of Upcoming Elections and Electronic Voting

BY MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

Kelly Degnan, the now former US ambassador to Georgia, spoke about the upcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia in an interview given to Radio "Freedom" and emphasized the need to conduct them fairly. This started a heated discussion between the ruling "Georgian Dream" and the opposition political spectrum. This started a heated discussion between the ruling "Georgian Dream" and the opposition political spectrum.

According to Degnan, no one said that the parliamentary elections of 2020, as well as the municipal elections of 2021, were fair. In order to make the 2024 elections "better" and to reduce possible flaws in the electoral process, Degnan singled out several points: Election monitoring is a long-term mission because only monitoring on the day of the election does not provide much and the rigging of the elections starts months before. For many years, there have been "long-term" tactics used by various authorities

in Georgia, which are supposed to ensure Intimidation of people, bribery of votes, and threats to people that if they don't vote the way they should, they will lose their jobs. Therefore, early monitoring of the election process will reveal such violations and help Georgian voters to later have confidence in the result.

During the 2020 parliamentary elections, the Covid pandemic precluded long-term monitoring of the election process, and we should expect such monitoring in 2024. The head of "Fair Elections" (ISFED) Nino Dolidze immediately responded to this statement of the former US ambassador, who said that in order to see the full picture of the pre-election environment and the course of the elections, it is desirable for international missions to observe the process for at least 6 months.

The Georgian Dream was particularly irritated by Kelly Degnan's statement that conducting the upcoming parliamentary elections with an electronic system (90% of precincts will switch to the electronic vot-

ing system in the upcoming elections in Georgia) is not a guarantee that the elections will be clean and fair.

It can also be manipulated if people do not know how to use this system. That's why it's important for voters and precinct officials to know how the system works.

The opposition's response to the risks of electronic voting was much more critical. According to Nika Gvaramia, the electronic voting system is accompanied by much more serious threats, and as the Georgian Dream intends to hold electronic elections, it serves to falsify the elections. According to Gvaramia, electronic voting should be used to allow every immigrant to vote for the desired party through a secure system.

According to the leader of the National Movement Levan Khabeishvili, there are various means of manipulation in electronic elections. For example, printing fake ID cards. The opposition's talk about the dangers of electronic elections was followed by retaliatory statements from the Georgian Dream

side. According to their statements, both the opposition and the ambassadors of the partner countries have been demanding electronic elections for years, this request was also recorded in Charles Michel's document.

The opposition also supported the adoption of the relevant law in the parliament. The leaders of the Georgian Dream consider it impossible to falsify electronic elections and explain the "campaign to discredit the elections" by the opposition one year before the elections by saying that the opposition is "doomed to inevitable defeat" in the next elections. The Georgian Dream considered Degnan's appeal to the citizens of Georgia to actively participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections as interference in the country's internal affairs and a "push to revolution." "This is a push, an indication that the election process should take place in a revolutionary scenario," - This is how Georgian Dream parliamentarian Irakli Kadagishvili assessed Kelly Degnan's words. According to him, such a statement is usually made by a political party when voters are called to protect their votes.

The discussion held in the Georgian political spectrum on Kelly Degnan's statement regarding the elections showed

that the ruling of the Georgian Dream not only excludes the possibility of any fraud in future elections but also considers the previous elections (both the 2020 parliamentary and 2021 municipal elections) to have been flawlessly conducted.

The opposition does not trust the elections conducted by the Georgian Dream and believes that the current ruling power, which has been in power since 2012 and is actively talking about its future victory, will use all possible means of falsification.

According to the opposition, Kelly Degnan's interview expresses the point of view of the West, which looks critically at the prospect of holding fair elections by the Georgian Dream, and if frauds are detected during the upcoming elections, the West will no longer turn a blind eye to it.

As for the opposition (the real opposition, which the ruling power declares as "radical opposition"), he talks about the inevitable change of the current government and considers it necessary to mobilize the voters as much as possible and control the election administration to prevent fraud. Such statements were made by the opposition during the previous elections as well, but its fight against the Georgian Dream was unsuccessful.

## The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

### Government's Anti-Corruption Bureau to Monitor Party Finances Beginning September



Starting from September, the government's anti-corruption bureau will take on the role of overseeing party finances, a responsibility previously held by the audit function. Specifically, political parties will be obligated to submit detailed reports of

their incomes, expenses, and political donations to the Anti-Corruption Bureau. These reports must comprehensively outline expenditures, income sources, and contributions.

Irakli Kobakhidze, the Chairman of the Georgian Dream party, stated that this action aligns with the recommendations provided by the European Union.

"The European Union recommended consolidating anti-corruption functions within the anti-corruption service. This involved not only establishing a distinct service but also merging functions. One of these functions includes the oversight of party finances.

Hence, in accordance with the European Union's guidance, this responsibility was transferred from the audit service to the anti-corruption service. In other words, this task will no longer remain under the audit service but will be shifted to the anti-corruption service," Kobakhidze stated.

Kobakhidze, the Chairman of 'Georgian Dream', dismissed the significance of such remarks, asserting that he doesn't lend weight to such comments.

Grigory Karasin, who leads the International Committee of the Russian Council, conveyed to Sputnik that Russia is actively working towards garnering recognition of the so-called Republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by countries like China and India.

"We have heard such statements. The most important thing for us is that Georgia has successfully adhered to the non-recognition policy for all these years. Thanks to our government's non-recognition policy, the number of countries recognizing the so-called independence has not increased in all these years," Kobakhidze said.

"Despite these statements, we will continue our successful non-recognition policy. We have heard these remarks, but our non-recognition policy has been successful regardless. This is their business; I will not delve into their statements. I focus on understanding our non-recognition policy, and this policy is achieving significant success," he emphasized.

### Irakli Kobakhidze Responds to Grigory Karasin's Statement

In response to Grigory Karasin's statement, Irakli

## Chairman of Georgian Dream Party, Irakli Kobakhidze, Discusses Charles Michel's Statement on EU Expansion

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whom it concerns the year 2030, this is interesting. There are candidate countries of the European Union, which received the candidate status, for example, 18, 12 years ago, there are such countries. When a country becomes a candidate 18 years ago and there is a promise to it that it can become a member of the European Union in 7 years, of course, this does not give grounds for great optimism. Hopefully, in the future, it will be specified that 2030 is a relevant date for all countries that have candidate status, or that will receive candidate status in the near future," said Kobakhidze.

According to him, they will do

everything to get Georgia candidate status. He says the country has made tangible progress in implementing the 12 points.

"Our government will be transparent before the European Union from the beginning to the end, all grounds will be ready for us to be granted candidate status in December. Of course, the decision will be political. Let's see what decision they will make. We have reason for optimism because everything is ready to get candidate status," he said.

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, in his speech at the international strategic forum held in Slovenia on August 28, said that the expansion of the European Union is no longer a dream and he should be ready for it.

## Weather

### Wednesday, August 30

Day Rain  
High: 24°C

Night Mostly Cloudy  
Low: 17°C

### Thursday, August 31

Day Partly Cloudy  
High: 28°C

Night Clear  
Low: 17°C

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