

Senator Shaheen and Congressman Turner Reaffirm Support for Georgia Amid Concerns Over Relations and Democracy

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

On August 11, US Senator Jeanne Shaheen and Congressman Mike Turner held a press conference to discuss their recent visit to Georgia. The bipartisan delegation aimed to convey unwavering US support for Georgia's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration. The visit also provided an opportunity to address concerns about the state of democracy in Georgia and the future of US-Georgian relations.

Senator Shaheen emphasized the importance of the visit, stating, "We are here because we are committed to Georgia, to the partnership that the United States and Georgia have had for over 30 years; to continue the country moving in a democratic direction." She emphasized concerns over the upcoming elections, stressing the necessity for them to be conducted freely and fairly. These concerns were raised directly with Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, alongside the issue of the Georgian government spreading false claims that the U.S. was involved in a plot to overthrow the government. Shaheen noted that this disinformation had contributed to a "pause" in the US-Georgia relations.

Congressman Turner reiterated the US's commitment to Georgia, underscoring that their visit was solely focused on the



country, highlighting the U.S. desire to support democratic institutions and European integration. He warned of the growing aggressiveness of authoritarian regimes toward democracies, using Russia's occupation of Georgian territories as a prime example. Turner expressed disappointment over the current state of US-Georgia relations, voicing a desire for improvement.

Following their meeting with Prime Minister Kobakhidze, both lawmakers expressed dissatisfaction. Shaheen regretted the lack of concrete suggestions from the Prime Minister on how to improve relations with the U.S., describing it as

"disappointing."

She contrasted this with the positive impressions she gained from meeting Georgian students and entrepreneurs, who she said were "very appreciative" of the US support. Turner echoed these sentiments, noting that the Prime Minister did not take responsibility for the deteriorating relationship or offer any plans to reset it.

Looking ahead, the lawmakers were asked about potential U.S. actions in support of the Georgian people, including the possibility of sanctions against influential figures like Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party.

Senator Shaheen expressed disappointment that Ivanishvili declined to meet with the delegation, emphasizing the need for Georgia to align with its citizens' aspirations rather than mirroring Russian policies. Turner added that the U.S. has already suspended some funding to Georgia pending a review of its commitment to democratic institutions.

When questioned about the potential impact of future US elections on policy toward Georgia, both lawmakers affirmed that US support for Georgia's democratic aspirations would remain consistent, regardless of the administration. Turner and

Shaheen stressed the bipartisan nature of US foreign policy toward Georgia, noting that support for democracy and European integration has been a constant across both Republican and Democratic administrations.

As Georgia prepares for parliamentary elections on October 26, the US delegation's visit underscored a commitment to ensuring the elections are free, fair, and reflective of the will of the Georgian people. Shaheen emphasized the importance of international and domestic observers in safeguarding the electoral process, reaffirming the US's dedication to supporting democracy in Georgia.

TI Alleges Ivanishvili Family Owns Moscow Properties, Georgian Dream Denies

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

A recent investigation by Transparency International

- Georgia is alleging that the family of billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgian Dream founder and former Prime Minister

of Georgia, owns valuable properties in two prestigious districts of Moscow. The investigation has raised questions about Ivanishvili's ties to Russia, despite his past assurances of severing all connections with the country.

The investigation claims that the Ivanishvili family is linked to two private residences located in the Sokol and Odintsovo areas of Moscow. One of these properties reportedly includes a large estate covering over 52,000 square meters, encompassing nine plots of land, three garages, and several auxiliary buildings. The alleged market value of these properties is estimated to be at least \$14.7 million, with the potential to be even higher.

According to the investigation, the Ivanishvili family is also accused of renting out one of these residences for approximately

\$9,000 per month, earning income through Russian banks that are currently under US sanctions. The properties are said to be registered under the names of Ivanishvili's wife, Ekaterine Khvedelidze, their son, Uta Ivanishvili, and a Russian company, Aqua-Space LLC, which is allegedly owned by Ivanishvili through offshore entities.

Transparency International - Georgia further alleges that the majority of these properties were purchased and registered in recent years, specifically in 2021 and 2024. The organization criticized Ivanishvili, stating, "This suggests that his 2011 promise to sever ties with Russia was false. Instead of cutting ties, his family has been expanding its property holdings in Moscow."

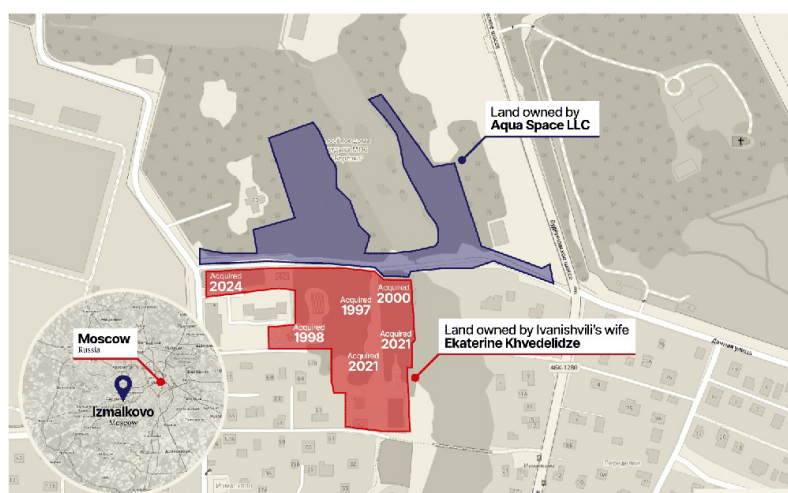
In response to these allegations, the ruling party Georgian Dream,

which Ivanishvili founded, issued a firm rebuttal, labeling the investigative report as "pure lies." The party's press office strongly denied the claims, asserting that the report was based on false information and lacked evidence.

The Georgian Dream press statement emphasized that Bidzina Ivanishvili has not purchased any property in Russia since 1998. The party also dismissed the claims about recent property acquisitions, insisting that neither Ivanishvili nor any member of his family has traveled to Russia since 1998. They criticized the report as an attempt to create a "sensational and scandalous story" based on misrepresented facts.

The statement from the party highlighted their frustration with what they see as a deliberate attempt to damage Ivanishvili's reputation: "Spreading such lies without any evidence does not meet any journalistic standards. It is unclear what the authors of this article aim to achieve with these baseless accusations."

The Ivanishvili Family's Properties Outside Moscow



Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6967; Euro - 2.9451; GBP - 3.4388; 100 Russian Ruble - 3.0474; Swiss Franc - 3.1172

Caucasus Barometer 2024 Reveals Georgia's Political Parties Are Weaker Than They Claim

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

A recent survey, "Caucasus Barometer 2024," revealed that political parties in Georgia enjoy less support than they believe. The ruling Georgian Dream has a 21% approval rating, while other political parties need substantial effort to surpass the 5% threshold.

The survey, conducted by CRRC from April 16 to May 13, 2024, was completed two months ago, and party representatives might claim (as they often do) that the survey is not trustworthy or outdated and that the situation has changed. It is difficult to determine what the so-called "internal surveys" conducted by the parties show, but the results of the "Caucasus Barometer" should cause serious concern.

Representatives of the Georgian Dream continually state that their internal surveys show support exceeding 60%, and Bidzina Ivanishvili even claimed that they need a constitutional majority in the next parliament. The 21% recorded by the "Caucasus Barometer" is significantly lower than these claims. If the 2024 elections were held with a 1% threshold like in 2020, the Georgian Dream would inevitably have to relinquish

power. Therefore, the 5% threshold is maintained. Votes for parties failing to cross this threshold will be redistributed in favour of the current ruling party.

For some time, experts and party representatives have believed, almost as an axiom, that overcoming the 5% threshold would not be a problem for several opposition parties. Among these were named the United National Movement (UNM), based on previous results, Giorgi Gakharia's "For Georgia," and "Lelo." The "Caucasus Barometer" of 2024 has undermined such optimism.

It turned out that two parties have a 3% rating: the United National Movement (under Levan Khabeishvili during the survey) and the newly formed "New" party (led by Nika Melia and Nika Gvaramia). The split within the United National Movement and the creation of the "New" party have removed part of the UNM's electorate. They cannot take for granted crossing the 5% threshold.

According to the "Caucasus Barometer," another 11 parties have a 1% rating each, with other parties receiving only 2% combined. This is the reality shown by the survey. There have long been calls for Western-

oriented opposition parties to unite ahead of the elections. The idea of creating a large opposition coalition, initially proposed by the UNM, was rejected by a significant portion of Western-oriented parties, and it was considered more appropriate to form several centers. With the approach of the elections, this unification process has accelerated.

If we consider the movement of 1% rated parties as indicated by the "Caucasus Barometer," the UNM has been joined by Strategy Aghmashenebeli (Giorgi Vashadze). The "Akhali" party has joined with Zurab Japaridze's "Girchi - More Freedom" and other parties that did not reach the 1% threshold. "Lelo" (Mamuka Khazaradze, Badri Japaridze, Davit Usupashvili), which had a 1% rating according to the "Caucasus Barometer," has been joined by similarly rated parties such as Ana Dolidze's "For People" and Aleko Elisashvili's "Citizens".

It is already known that former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia's "For Georgia," which had a 1% rating according to the "Caucasus Barometer," will run separately, and the 5% threshold could pose a problem.

The remaining 1% Western-

oriented parties are the "Labor Party" (Shalva Natelashvili) and "European Georgia" (Giga Bokeria). If these two parties do not join any Western-oriented coalition, they will likely not make it to parliament.

Regarding other 1% parties, if "Conservative Party" (Zviad Dzidziguri) and the conservative movement "Alt-Info" run separately, they will take away some votes from the Georgian Dream. It is also likely that Iago Khvichia's "Girchi" will not make it to parliament. Other parties with a combined rating of 2% will probably participate in the elections and take a small portion of the votes.

It should be noted that more than half of the respondents avoided giving a specific answer. 31% stated that there is no party they support, 8% said they do not know which party they support, and 21% declined to answer.

Considering previous survey results, distrust towards political parties and dissatisfaction with their performance are high in Georgia. According to IRI's 2022 survey, 72% of respondents said they want to see new political parties in the next elections, and 42% stated that no existing party represents their interests.

It is noteworthy that the com-

bined support percentage for specific parties (39%) is lower than the number of those willing to participate in the elections. When asked if they would participate in parliamentary elections if they were held next week, 65% of respondents said they definitely would, and 18% said they probably would. Therefore, a significant portion of citizens want to participate in the elections but are unsure which party to support.

With less than 100 days remaining until the October 26 elections, the political arena is extremely polarised. Both sides have declared the upcoming elections as a referendum. According to the Georgian Dream, this election will be a choice between war and peace. If they fail to maintain power, the so-called "global war party" will drag Georgia into a war. The pro-Western opposition, on the other hand, claims that the upcoming elections are a choice between Georgia's Western orientation and Russia. They argue that to restore the Western vector in Georgian politics, it is essential to remove the Georgian Dream from power and bring a pro-Western coalition government into office.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Senator Shaheen and Congressman Turner Discuss Georgian Election Concerns with NGOs



During their visit to Georgia, U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen and Congressman Mike Turner met with representatives of various non-governmental organizations to discuss key issues surrounding Georgia's upcoming

elections and the impact of recently passed "Foreign Agents" law.

Nona Kurdovanidze, chairperson of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, provided insights after the meeting. She emphasized that the discussion primarily focused on the election

environment, which she described as one of the most critical events for Georgia in the coming months. "This year, in relation to Georgia, one of the most important and one can say the most important events that will

take place in the coming months are the elections," Kurdovanidze stated.

A significant portion of the conversation was dedicated to the challenges posed by the "Foreign Agents" law.

"The discussion was about what challenge we, non-governmental organizations, and the society as a whole are facing when the 'Russian law' has already been adopted in Georgia," Kurdovanidze explained. She also expressed concerns that NGOs could soon face increased scrutiny and monitoring as a result of this law, potentially hindering their ability to operate freely.

Prime Minister Slams 'Foreign Interference' in Georgian Elections

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has condemned what he describes as "unprecedented and gross foreign interference" in the country's upcoming parliamentary elec-

tions. In a recent media statement, Kobakhidze asserted that this external meddling represents a serious breach of electoral principles but reassured that it would not impact the final results.

"The good thing is that this external intervention will not affect the final results of the elections," Kobakhidze said. He criticized recent political events that featured images of former President Mikheil Saakashvili, labeling them as part of a broader effort to reintroduce authoritarianism in Georgia.

Kobakhidze argued that such



actions are attempts to undermine democratic values and warned against a return to authoritarian rule. "When you call an event where Saakashvili's pictures are exhibited a Democracy Festival, it is clear that someone is trying to hold a festival of authoritarianism in Georgia," Prime Minister said.

Weather

Monday, August 12

Day Mostly Cloudy

High: 31°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 20°C

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